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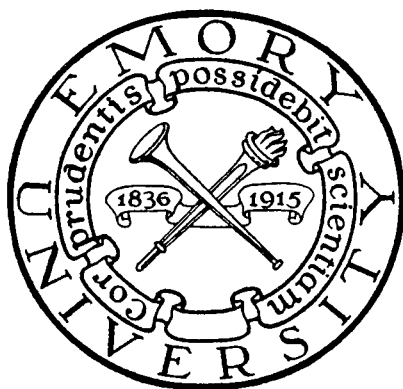
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Bears not each human figure the godlike stamp on his forehead?  
Readest thou not in his face thine origin? Is he not sailing  
Lost like thyself on an ocean unknown, and is he not guided  
By the same stars that guide thee?  
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This is the fruit of love, and it is by its fruits that we know it.

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# ATHERSTONE PRIORY.

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## CHAPTER I.

LISA.

‘WHAT time did Mary say they would be here, Helen?’ asked Dr Tennent, walking, one cold afternoon in February, into the drawing-room at Atherstone Priory, and standing there while he buttoned up his great-coat in preparation for meeting the keen north wind which was whistling drearily without the house. ‘What time did she say they would get here? Seven o’clock, was it?’

‘No, six, I believe—unless they have changed their minds again since she wrote, which is not improbable. I do wish,’ continued Mrs Tennent, laying down her work for a moment to stir the fire, ‘I do wish when people fix a time for coming to a place, they would keep to it. There is nothing I dislike more than such perpetual changes, and Mary knows it. I think she might have shown a little more thought.’

‘My dear, I don’t see how she could help it,’ returned the doctor, ‘I don’t think it was her fault. And, I can’t tell what difference it makes whether they come to-day or to-morrow. It is not as if Percy were a stranger, and obliged to stand upon ceremony with us. The great thing is to get him here as quickly as possible; and if he is able to travel sooner than we expected, so much the better. London lodgings are wretched places, and there’s no doubt he will be glad enough to find himself at home again.’

There was no answer to this. Percy was not Mrs Tennent’s son, and therefore it was not to be expected she could enter so entirely into his father’s feelings of satisfaction at his return after a long absence, as to exclude all other considerations. She

had decided opinions also upon certain subjects; and these opinions were not to be trifled with, as everybody knew. She went on with her work now in a grave determined way, which said as plainly as anything could say, that she was not pleased, and Dr Tennent fidgeted about the room as if he would have liked to say something else, but was not sure how it would be taken.

‘Are you going out again?’ his wife asked at last.

‘Yes, but only to Mrs Gunning’s. I promised to meet Symonds there at five o’clock. It must be nearly that now.’ But although he made this announcement, the doctor seemed in no hurry to go.

‘I heard from John to-day,’ he said abruptly, after a long silence.

‘Did you? I am surprised at that. It is so long since he wrote, that I thought he had dropped the acquaintance. But I suppose he is on his road home, and thinks it time to find out old friends.’

‘I don’t know; he says nothing about coming back. He is at Wiesbaden now.’

‘At Wiesbaden! And what is he doing there? He had much better return to England. He ought to be looking after his affairs, instead of running after pleasure abroad.’

‘Perhaps so,’ was the answer, in rather an absent tone. ‘I don’t know, though, Helen, that his roving disposition has not been of some use this time. Certainty of any kind is better than suspense; and our doubts about Emily Kennedy are set at rest now for ever.’

Mrs Tennent started. ‘Emily Kennedy! What do you mean? He has not heard of her?’

‘Yes, he has—yes, he has.’ And the doctor folded his arms and gazed abstractedly into the fire; ‘and perhaps it was the best thing that could have been heard of her,’ he went on at length. ‘She is dead, Helen; she died six months ago at Wiesbaden. There can be no doubt of it, for although she went under another name, the chaplain’s account of her, and the things they found, prove it most certainly. There is John’s letter. You will see how he first got the clue, and I am glad he followed it up. It is a relief to know it is all over.’

‘Yes, indeed it is,’ was Mrs Tennent’s answer, in a low bitter tone, as she glanced over the contents of the note her husband handed to her. ‘And the sooner she is forgotten the better.’

Better still it would be if we could forget she had ever lived ; but that is impossible.'

'Poor Emily!' sighed the doctor; 'poor Emily! Who would have thought it? So gay and happy as she used to be! She was the beauty of the place then—the prettiest girl in all the country round. Lisa takes after her in that—she has all her mother's good looks; but we must hope she will have a happier life of it, poor child.'

A laugh outside the window roused him—a clear, ringing, joyous laugh it was: but it seemed to strike him painfully just then. He looked up quickly.

'What do you intend to do about her?' he asked, his eye following the figure of a young girl who was running across the lawn. 'About Lisa, I mean. Will you tell her?'

'Tell her! What are you thinking of, Dr Tennent? She never asks after her. I have never even heard her mention her name. Most probably she supposes her to have been dead for years; and what good would it do to enlighten her now? She can't profess to care much for a person whom she can hardly remember; and we should never dream of putting her into mourning or ourselves either. Most certainly I shall not tell her.'

'Very well,' said the doctor, who generally deferred to his wife's opinion; 'very well, do as you like about it; it is sure to be right, whatever you settle; and of course it can make no difference to her. She has a home here, poor child. And we are not sorry to have her—eh, Helen? She is a good little girl, is Lisa, and very affectionate.'

Mrs Tennent coughed. 'Lisa may be what you say; I don't know. But it seems to me that if she were as fond of us as you fancy, she would show it more in her actions. She gives me a great deal more trouble than all my own children put together. She is careless and forgetful, and very wilful; and she takes no pains to improve. I thought I could have depended on her, while Mary was away, to go on working at her own studies, and keep Susan and Constance to theirs; but she has done nothing of the kind. There has been no order at all in the schoolroom; and considering that she is nearly sixteen, it is too bad to think I cannot trust her. I mean to speak to her this evening, and tell her how displeased I am. She is too old to go on in the childish, thoughtless way she does, caring for nothing but play. It is my belief that, if she could race up and down the garden all



day with the dog, or shoot sparrows with Arthur, and play at cricket and foot-ball with him and the boys, she would be quite content. And she is incorrigible. It is thoroughly disheartening to have anything to do with her.'

'She does well enough when Mary is here,' said Dr Tennent, in a tone of excuse. 'You can't find fault with her then, my dear.'

'I beg your pardon, I don't think so. But even if she did, I don't see what good that would do. She can't have Mary to look after her all her life, and what is to become of her in two or three years' time, when she has to go out as a governess? Who will trust her with their children, I should like to know, when she can't be trusted to look after herself? It is ridiculous to talk as you do, Dr Tennent. But I shall speak to her this evening; and very seriously too.'

'Well, well, do as you think best; only don't be too hard upon her, Helen,' said the doctor. 'She is only a child, after all; and we must remember she has no father—and no mother now,' he added, with some emphasis. 'We must not let her think us unkind.'

'No one wishes to be unkind,' said Mrs Tennent, drily. 'But it strikes me you would be if you had your own way. It would be great unkindness to let her go on as she is doing now; though I quite believe you would if you could, and all because you are afraid of being thought unkind.'

Dr Tennent smiled a little. 'Perhaps I should; but I have not the chance, you see. However, I daresay, you will not have so much cause for complaint now. Arthur goes to-morrow, and they will none of them be so wild when he is away. By the by, I think we shall soon have to give up asking him to spend his vacations here. The girls are growing up. Elinor must be more than eighteen by this time, and she has looked a woman for the last three years; and Lisa is nearly sixteen, you say. We must mind what we are about, Helen, or we shall have him falling in love with one of them. I think in the summer he had better pay Ralph a visit at Gainsford, instead of coming here. I don't believe he has been there half-a-dozen times since his father died, and he ought to see more of his brother. It would be a good plan, wouldn't it?

'Perhaps so.' Mrs Tennent liked plans to originate with herself. 'But it will be time enough to talk of that when the summer comes. I have no fear of love-making between

him and the girls. When young people grow up together, they very seldom dream of such a thing; they know each other too well; and he has been here so much, that they look upon him as a brother.'

She spoke decidedly; but the doctor, contrary to his usual custom, did not appear to be quite convinced.

'I don't know; one does hear of such things sometimes, and it would be awkward if it should happen. He has very little but his profession to look to, so it would be years before they could marry, even if'——

'Even if they want to do so, which they never will. Arthur knows well enough what his prospects are, and that he cannot keep a wife. He will have something to do to keep himself first—curates without private means can't afford to marry—and by the time he gets a living, Elinor will be settled, and Lisa out of his way. I know what young people are, Dr Tennent, and how little danger there is of such a thing happening as you suppose. If I saw it beginning, I should put a stop to it at once.'

'Very well,' said the doctor, 'I only hope you will find it out in time. I should not like them to be made unhappy for want of a little caution on our part. And now I'm off. Past five o'clock, I declare, and I ought to be in Hammond Place.' And catching up his hat he disappeared, nearly running over his daughter Elinor, who was just coming into the room as he ran out of it.

Dr Tennent was one of the leading medical men in the large and populous manufacturing town of Atherstone, and had an extensive practice, not only in the town itself, but for many miles round, among the county families. His father and grandfather had both occupied the same position, and had been universally respected by all who knew them; and he himself inherited no small share of their popularity. He was a leading man in the place in many ways. There were few schemes of usefulness or benevolence carried out in the town, of which he was not either the originator, or a promoter and active supporter. How he accomplished so much without wearing himself out, was a wonder to every one who knew him. But he had a never-failing amount of energy, and was one of those hardy, wiry men, who appear capable of getting through any quantity of business without breaking down; and nobody had ever heard him complain of being overworked. He was up

early and late, in and out at all hours, and hardly knew what it was to have a few quiet minutes at home, so incessant were the demands made upon him both by rich and poor; and of these two classes, the latter had by no means the fewest of his thoughts. The rich could always find a doctor, he said, but those who were not so well off were not so sure of having attention paid them; and the poor, having once found that they had a friend in him, were not slow in taking advantage of the discovery.

It was well for him that he had a wife who was able to take the management of his family off his hands, and who went her own way to work without asking for either advice or approbation. A far larger household than she had to manage would have been no burden to Mrs Tennent, although her present establishment was by no means small. She had seven children of her own, and the doctor, who had been twice married, had also a son and daughter by his first wife. It was true that the son, who was in the army, could hardly be said to make one of the family; but his place was filled by a nephew of Mrs Tennent's, who, first as a schoolboy, and now as a young man at college, had long been in the habit of making her house his home. An orphan niece of the doctor's also lived with them, and completed the number of the recognised members of the household, but not at all that of the stray friends and relations, who found their way there at all times, for the doctor was very hospitable, and liked nothing better than to see plenty of faces and hear cheerful voices about him.

His house was a large one, and, like his practice, had been handed down to him from his grandfather; but what had, in the first Dr Tennent's time, been a pleasant suburban residence, with green meadows, sunny banks, and wooded land round it, was now situated in the centre of a crowded district, and all that remained of its once rural aspect was a large, well-planted garden at the back—the especial delight of the younger members of the family. The house itself, called the Priory, from the fact of its standing upon the site of what had formerly been a monastic building, was a rambling and rather old-fashioned place, full of small, low-pitched rooms up-stairs, and large, but equally low and inconvenient rooms, below. Mrs Tennent declared that many of them were not habitable, and that do what she would in the way of furnishing and ornamenting, nothing ever made them even decently comfortable. But nobody else seemed to think so; on

the contrary, they were always well filled, and every one contrived to make themselves very happy there.

If laughter and merriment, indeed, are to be taken as signs of happiness, there was plenty of it to be found at the Priory; nor was that cold February day any exception to the rule, as was testified by the ringing voices and gay shouts of a party on the lawn, who all that afternoon had been eager with a game at snow-balling, and who even now, when the evening was closing in, seemed in no hurry to forego their amusement. The outward aspect of things was not enlivening; but fortunately for them, their spirits were not affected by trifles; and although the neighbouring red-brick houses, with their roofs covered with blackened snow, looked drearily desolate, and the old tower of the Priory church close by rose dark against the leaden sky; and though the leafless boughs of the lime-trees in the garden were frosted with ice, and the air was gloomy with another coming storm, they seemed to find no drawback in these circumstances, and only played on all the more merrily, as the shades of twilight warned them they would soon have to give up their game. They had raised a parapet of snow between some trees and the garden wall, and behind this Arthur Darrell (who, in spite of his being at college, was by no means above finding amusement with boys and girls), had entrenched himself with his two little cousins, Susan and Constance. They were engaged in a vigorous defence of their fortress against a no less vigorous attempt to dislodge them from it made by Fred and Charley—boys of fourteen and twelve—aided by Lisa Kennedy, the latter by no means the least energetic of the party.

With her dress tucked up, her hat falling off, and her hair in wild disorder, she danced about, the gayest of them all, little dreaming of the news that had come that day, or of the sad fate of the mother whose life had so long been shrouded in mystery. There was no shadow on her face; no trace of sadness in the clear tones of her voice, and her laugh was merriment itself; careless unthinking merriment, as if no such things as doubt or sorrow had ever crossed her path. With the childish earnestness that always characterised her pursuit of any pleasure, she was absorbed in her game, and had not a thought beyond the amusement of the moment. Darting backwards and forwards, gathering up the snow in handfuls, and aiming it with unerring precision at the besieged party, she proved herself quite as formidable an antagonist as either of her boy-cousins, being as



reckless as they were of the balls which Arthur most ungallantly flung back at her with no sparing hand, greeting each with fresh peals of mirth, and only pausing from time to time to brush the snow from her dress, or collect new supplies for another attack. Taking advantage of a diversion on the part of her fellow-assailants, which took off Arthur's attention, she made a rush on the unprotected side of the parapet, and seizing the flag that was fixed there (a stick with a red handkerchief tied to it), she waved it above her head with a gay shout of triumph, and jumped down into the enclosure. The other besiegers followed her example, and a loud hurrah from everybody proclaimed that the fortress was taken. That 'hurrah' brought their amusement to an end, for it roused Mrs Tennent from the reverie in which—a most unusual thing for her—she had been indulging over the fire after her husband left her.

'Call them in, Elinor!' she said, looking up; 'I had no idea they were out of doors.'

Elinor, a pale, delicate, but rather pretty girl, with blue eyes, and a profusion of dark hair, who was sitting at the window with her head resting on her hand, rose from her seat with evident reluctance, and walked slowly from the room. She shivered as she went into the hall, and taking up a shawl, threw it round her before she gathered courage to open the garden door and summon the party into the house; although, when she had done so, she did not retreat at once, but stood, waiting, it seemed, for them to make their appearance. Some little delay took place before the mandate was obeyed; but at length they came trooping in, all in various stages of indignation at being interrupted in the midst of their delightful occupation. Fred and Charley even went so far as to vote that their sister ought to be rolled in a snow drift for being the bearer of such unwelcome tidings, while Arthur came behind, dragging on the unwilling Susan and Constance, who were hanging to his coat tails, and uttering lamentable remonstrances. Lisa was the only one who was silent; but that was because she was endeavouring to unfasten a very intricate-looking knot in the strings of her hat.

'Well!' she remarked at last, 'I suppose I shall have to wear this thing for the rest of my life, for I can't untie it, and I mayn't cut the strings. What can I do, Arthur? Will it look very odd if I go about in this way all my days?'

An appeal at which Arthur turned round, and contemplated her for a moment or two with much gravity.

'A-hem !' he said, 'we won't say anything about the singularity of your appearance. Still, if it's a case of necessity, I think you may make yourself comfortable by the reflection that the appendage, though novel, is not unbecoming. Only—excuse me—you might look a little more easy and natural. At present you have the appearance of being in—what shall I call it—in decidedly embarrassed circumstances.

'And so I am, for I am nearly choked. O Arthur ! it was one of your snow-balls that knocked it off, and it would only be charitable of you to help me, instead of standing there laughing at me.'

'Admiring you, you mean. But why didn't you pull it on again when I knocked it off, and then you would never have been in this dreadful difficulty. Let me see, though, what I can do ; I lay any wager I'll have it off in half a second.' And before Lisa could stop him, he had the hat in his hand, much to her astonishment, although she exclaimed in consternation, when she saw a deplorable slit in it, in consequence of the ribbon having been violently torn from the straw,

'And a lot of my hair he has taken too ! What a wretch you are, Arthur ; and look what a hole you have made here ! I don't know what Aunt Helen will say when she sees it. I shall get such a scolding.'

'Nonsense, ask Lane to patch it up ; she'll soon make it right. And it's not worse than it was before. I've seen the top of it flapping about for the last three weeks. But it is only in keeping with the rest of your dress ; you are about one of the most perfect specimens of the tag-rag-and-bobtail tribe I ever saw.'

He glanced as he spoke, and Lisa followed the direction of his eye. She certainly did not present a very reputable figure, as far as her toilette was concerned, for her boots and stockings were wet through, her petticoat was adorned with numerous formidable-looking rents, and her dress was torn from the gathers, and trailed on the ground behind her. Her hair, too, had fallen down, and hung over her neck and shoulders, in a wet, tangled mass of brown and gold. But in spite of the disadvantages under which she appeared, nothing could detract from the rare loveliness of her face and form, and Arthur's glance was one quite as much of admiration as of pretended disdain at the state of her dress. From her earliest childhood, Lisa had always been noted for her extreme beauty—a beauty which would have attracted attention at any time, from its perfectness of feature and delicacy of

outline and colouring, but which a brilliant smile and the winning expression of her large hazel eyes rendered irresistible. But she had not yet learned to look for the admiration with which none could help regarding her; and perhaps the utter absence of self-consciousness was by no means one of her least charms. She did not notice the look on her cousin's face, being quite engaged with examining the state of her attire. As she was well accustomed, however, to constant fault-finding on the subject, she did not seem much alarmed at the prospect of the scolding in store for her; and after having stuck a pin in the gathers of her dress, and contemplated her tattered petticoat for a few moments, she looked up with a laugh.

'Never mind, it can't be helped. You are not much better yourself, Arthur. Look at that mud on your coat—and look at your boots! Oh, he is a figure! isn't he, Nelly?'

'Yes, I think he is; there is not much to choose between you all,' was the answer. 'You look very like scarecrows, every one of you—but perhaps you are the worst, Lisa. And now I advise you to go and make yourselves respectable before anybody sees you.'

'You are not complimentary,' retorted Arthur. 'And why didn't you come, Nelly, and make scarecrow number seven, instead of staying indoors in that grand and dignified manner, as if you were too good for us poor mortals? I thought you liked a game as well as any one.'

'So I do, some games—but not all. Snowballing I can't bear. It makes one so wet.'

'You didn't mind it last winter,' persisted Arthur; 'you used to join in it then. But I see what it is,' he added, with an odd look. 'It is the coming out that has done it. Now that you are a young lady, you can't condescend to such trifling amusements. Ah, well—that's the way of the world! Lisa, you see what you will come to. When you arrive at Nelly's age there will be an end of all fun for you. What will become of me, then, I wonder? I shall desert the Priory until I have arrived at years of discretion, and can be a proper companion for all the young ladies I shall find here.'

Elinor coloured a little at this speech, and looked rather stiff, but Lisa laughed.

'Well, there's plenty of time for you to stay, Arthur; you needn't go yet. I shan't be a grown-up young lady for two years to come; and not then if I can help it. O Nelly!

we've had the most glorious fun this afternoon! That was the Redan we were attacking—we were English and Russians. Arthur was Russian, but of course Fred and I wouldn't be anything but English; and Charley joined us, so we had to storm the fort. We got in at last, though we got some good hard blows before we did. Arthur hits so hard; it was no joke getting a knock with one of his balls. They were almost as bad as the real Russian bullets.'

'Not exactly,' remarked Arthur; 'Percy will have a different tale to tell you about Russian bullets, Miss Lisa.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Elinor, with a shudder. 'Don't talk, Lisa, as if fighting were nothing. You might know better than that, for I am sure we have heard enough about it lately. It is dreadful.'

Arthur laughed, and Lisa opened her eyes. 'Is it? I like to hear about it; and if I were a man I would be a soldier. I wish I were one, and I'd go off directly, and come in for all the fighting. You forget the glory, Elinor.'

'Ah, yes, the glory! that's it,' exclaimed Arthur. 'That's all she thinks of—'

The combat deepens. On ye brave,  
Who rush to glory or the grave.

Wasn't that what I heard you saying this morning, Lisa, in the green walk? And she looked so excited that I thought she meant to rush off herself "to glory or the grave." And there was old Bär tramping up and down by her side in a state of perfect bewilderment at her rhapsodies. He did not know what to make of the scene.'

'Arthur, you are horrid!' Lisa exclaimed, in intense indignation, and growing very red. She jumped up intending to stuff a handkerchief into his mouth, but he backed out of her way. 'I didn't know you were there, or I shouldn't have said it; and it's a shame of you to make fun of me. I'll never speak to you again, if you don't mind.'

'Not till next time,' said Arthur coolly, and looking at her flashing eyes in much admiration. 'I declare it's a pity she's not a soldier, as she wishes—isn't it, Nelly? How I used to like to see her last year poring over the papers, and growing so excited about everything that went on out there. But lately it has been very tame work, and if peace is declared, as everybody says, what will you do? Happily, Percy will be at home, and

you can make a demi-god of him, if you like. That you are prepared to worship him, I can see in your face whenever his name is mentioned.'

Lisa stamped the snow from her boots energetically. 'I am not prepared to do anything of the sort. I'll leave that for Isabel. I like to hear of all the brave things our soldiers do—but I don't care for Percy one bit, and I don't want to see him—he's not the sort of man that'——

'That you can make a hero of. You want an Adonis for that, and he is not one; I understand.'

'You don't, Arthur; I said nothing about an Adonis—you don't know what I mean at all; and I don't want to hear any more,' she added, stopping her ears as he was beginning again, 'I can't stay now—it's tea-time.'

She marched off, Arthur following her to her great disgust, and chanting in a solemn voice,

Few, few shall part, where many meet !  
The snow shall be their winding-sheet ;  
And every turf beneath their feet  
Shall mark a soldier's cemetery.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE LIKENESS IN MARY'S ROOM.

It was about an hour afterwards, that Mrs Tennent, on her way down-stairs, heard a chorus of voices, proceeding from a room which was used as a study, and usually went by the name of 'Mary's room,' because it was there that Mary, the eldest daughter of the family, officiated as governess when she was at home. She was away now, having been in London for nearly a month nursing her brother, who had been invalided home from the Crimea. But they were expected that evening, and apparently it would be no bad thing for some of the party to have Mary's quiet rule exercised among them again. Mrs Tennent thought so, certainly, as she opened the door of the room, and not being observed stood a silent spectator of the confusion that prevailed.

Presiding over the tea-tray, sat Lisa, with her hair still hanging down her back, and on either side of her, with their mouths full of bread and butter, lounged Susan and Constance, while

Arthur, who had turned in for reasons best known to himself, was assisting little George, the year-and-a-half-old baby, to make a circuit round the table among the cups and plates—a performance received with vehement applause by Fred and Charley, but which had already been attended by some disasters in the shape of two cups of tea upset, and a plate and saucer broken. The immediate cause of the uproar was George's having set his foot in the middle of the butter, and the feat had elicited such shouts of laughter from everybody, that he seemed very anxious to repeat the exploit. Mrs Tennent's entrance was in time to prevent this; and her face of displeasure, as she walked up to the table, speedily put an end to the commotion.

'Let Lane take him away,' she said, coldly; 'if he is the cause of such a disturbance, he must not stay here. Ring the bell, Constance.'

Constance jumped up from her chair in haste, and Susan sat bolt upright suddenly, and laid down an enormous piece of bread and butter which had been about to follow its predecessors, while George puckered up his rosy lips, and burst into a howl. Arthur looked a little foolish.

'I don't think he has done much damage,' he said, with a glance at the fragments of broken china. 'But I'll take him to Lane myself. Don't cry, my man; you shall walk on the floor as much as you like, that will be better than the butter. Keep me another cup of tea, Lisa, I shall be back in a minute.'

There was something in his tone, in spite of its would-be penitence, that provoked a titter, and although Mrs Tennent took no notice of it, his promise of returning probably influenced her, for instead of leaving the room, she drew a chair to the table and sat down, most effectually checking by her presence any more approaches to merriment. The four younger ones did not speak a word, and Arthur, when he came back, drank off his tea in all haste, and vanished again, much to the dismay of Lisa, who was in secret dread of what might be coming when he went. Nor were her apprehensions without foundation; for when tea was over, and she was making an attempt to escape unobserved, she was stopped peremptorily, and desired to come back. The others were sent away, and then began a lecture such as Mrs Tennent alone knew how to administer, and which, accustomed as Lisa was to such things, was formidable even to her. She stood silent and downcast, while her aunt went through the

catalogue of all her misdoings during the last month, and sighed inwardly as she listened to the long list of offences, most of which had been forgotten as soon as committed ; while as a wind-up, Mrs Tennent recurred to the scene she had just witnessed, which proved, she said, how little her niece was to be trusted. Instead of taking her cousin Mary's place while she was absent, as had been expected of her, she had made no attempt to keep order among the others, but had encouraged unruliness by her own example. But that was not the way to fit herself for the post which, as she well knew, she would one day have to fill. How would she be able to undertake the care of others, if she did not first learn to conduct herself properly. She must remember that she was growing up now, that the home in which she was living was not her own, and that in two or three years she would have to begin life as a governess. She ought to make the most of the advantages she was having, and learn to fit herself for her future duties. And Mrs Tennent went on to speak of the gratitude which, if no consideration for her own interests could do so, ought to influence her, while she hinted, in no very ambiguous terms, that she much feared no such feeling had any existence in her, or she surely would have more thought for those who were showing her kindness, and would study to please them.

Lisa listened to it all in silence, without attempting a reply of any kind ; but the crimson colour that dyed her cheeks grew deeper and deeper as her aunt alluded to her dependent position, and the motives that ought to actuate her ; and when Mrs Tennent, having delivered her lecture, left the room, she stood there still. It was not till the door closed, that she roused herself, and looking round with a quick, hurried glance, as if to make sure she was alone, threw herself down by the side of a low chair in front of the fire, and there hiding her face, sobbed bitterly. Whether her tears were those of grief or anger, would have been hard to say ; perhaps there was a mixture of both in them ; for her clenched hand, and the fierce, hard way in which she drew her breath, seemed to speak quite as much of passion as of sorrow.

But Lisa's stormy fits, violent as they were, seldom lasted long ; and when she had lain there for some minutes, and cried until she had exhausted herself, her sobs died away, and she sat up again, brushing away her tears, and looking as if she were ashamed of the passion to which she had given way. She had

hardly begun to collect her thoughts when a step in the passage near caught her ear, and she started from the floor, dreading nothing so much as to be surprised in any exhibition of feeling.

The person who entered the room was very different to Mrs Tennent. She was taller and darker and younger—but not very young, for all that, for she could not have been far off thirty; and the grave and thoughtful look upon her face, when it was in repose, made her appear even older. It was a very pleasant face, however, even though it could lay claim to no beauty, and was considered by some people to be remarkably plain. But that was by people who did not know her well; by those who did, nothing was ever noticed but the unvarying expression of sweetness that marked her features. By her brothers and sisters Mary was perfectly idolised; so entirely had she won their love that it was a fact seldom remembered by the younger branches of the family that she was not their own sister. More especially was she loved by poor Lisa, to whom she had taken a mother's place ever since the day when, worse than orphan, she had first been brought there; and who clung to her with an affection that was all the deeper because there were so few on whom she could bestow it. She sprang forward now, with a face that was radiant with pleasure, and from which every trace of sorrow was gone in a moment.

'Mary, dear Mary! Oh, how glad I am! When did you come? and what was I doing that I didn't hear you?' She threw her arms round her cousin, and bestowed on her such an embrace that it was quite a wonder Mary did not come out of it half demolished. 'What an age it is since you went away! It seems like four months instead of not four weeks. I am so glad—so very glad you are come back!'

'So am I glad to be back,' said Mary, with a smile; 'it is very pleasant to be at home again. But what are you doing here alone, Lisa dear? Is anything the matter?' she asked, looking at the long wet hair, and the eyelashes still fringed with tears.

But Lisa only smiled. 'Something *was* the matter, but never mind; it will be all right now you are here again. Aunt Helen has been scolding me, and that made me cry, but I don't mind it now.' And then, seeing her cousin looking at her anxiously, she added sorrowfully, 'The truth is, Mary, that I have been very bad. I have forgotten everything, and done all the worst



things you can imagine. I don't know how they happened ; for when you went, I made up my mind to be extra well-behaved, and go on better than when you are here. And I did at first—I really think I did—but somehow things got wrong afterwards. I didn't mean to forget, but I did ; and I have been all wrong.'

'Yes, I see,' said Mary, thoughtfully ; 'it was a pity, Lisa.'

'It was,' said Lisa, very earnestly, 'it was a *great* pity ; for I am sure, if anybody ever meant to be steady, I did. And yet I have vexed everybody, and done no good at all. Madame Ricard is very angry with me, and says she shall tell you how careless I have been ; and so does Mrs Dalton. That was because I forgot to practise a new piece she had given me. Aunt Helen is very angry too—you will hear all sorts of things about me from her. And Mary, she says I am ungrateful—but I am not that—oh, I am not that—indeed I am not !' And Lisa burst into tears again. 'You don't think it of me, do you ? You don't think me so bad as that ?'

'No, indeed I don't. My dearest little Lisa, don't cry in that way. No one who knew you would believe such a thing ; I think you must have misunderstood mamma. She never meant to say that, I am sure.'

'Yes, she did—she said it two or three times over. But if you don't believe it, Mary, I won't mind. You never would think it, though, I know—you are sure I could never be ungrateful to you, if I were to anybody else. It would be impossible for me to leave off loving you, when you have been so kind to me, and made me happy ever since I came here. I should be a wretch if I didn't love you from the bottom of my heart, a great deal more than anybody else in the whole world. I would do anything for you. At least,' she stopped, 'I always thought I would, but—it's that makes me so sorry now, because you see I haven't remembered half the things you wanted me to do.'

'Never mind,' said Mary, cheerfully ; 'you will have another opportunity, and you will take more care, I am sure. And now, if you are not very sorry I am come back, perhaps you won't mind helping me dress for dinner, or I shall be late ; it must be nearly half-past six.'

'Twenty minutes past,' said Lisa, glancing at the timepiece. 'Oh, that's plenty of time ; I can dress you in ten minutes comfortably. If you will sit down here in front of the fire and

warm yourself, I'll run and fetch your things. I looked out your evening dress before tea, so it is all ready. And I'll do your hair—I can always make that look nice, you know—though Aunt Helen does say I never do my own fit to be seen.' And Lisa, having her thoughts diverted from herself, began to take a cheerful view of life again, and danced off in search of her cousin's things almost in her usual spirits.

'And so Percy is really here?' she said, when she had returned, and was standing carefully arranging Mary's hair in the way she knew she liked best; 'he is really here, and he is better, isn't he?'

There was a sigh from Mary. 'Yes, I suppose so. They wouldn't have let him travel if he had not been; but—I don't know. I was too sanguine at first, I believe, and so I have been disappointed. I didn't think, when I went away, that it would be so bad. He has suffered so very much, poor fellow!'

Her sigh was very audible this time, and Lisa's face fell. 'But he will get well here,' she said; 'he will get well much faster than in London. He is sure to be better soon, and it is a great deal pleasanter both for him and you to be at home again.'

'Yes, so it is; and he was very anxious to come. I only hope he has not come too soon—before he was fit for the journey, I mean. I had no idea till yesterday morning that the surgeons would let him travel at present, but of course directly they said it would make no difference, we were only too glad to get away. He wished so much to come that it was difficult to persuade him to be at all prudent.'

Lisa was silent. She knew nothing of illness, and consequently was hardly able to enter into Mary's fears with regard to her brother. But the anxiety unconsciously betrayed in her cousin's tone infected her, and for a few moments she remained very thoughtful.

'He will have plenty of time to get well,' she said at length, as she was putting in the last hair-pin; 'he will be here quite till the summer, won't he? How very nice it will be for you, Mary, having him at home so long!' The latter part of this speech was decidedly magnanimous, for, as she had before asserted, Lisa had by no means any particular fancy for her cousin Percy, and as far as she was concerned, would not have been at all sorry if he had still been doing duty in the trenches before Sebastopol. She was a little disappointed to find that

her magnanimity was thrown away, and that her words did not produce all the effect that was intended. Her cousin smiled, indeed, but it was more at the eager tone than anything else, and she sat with her eyes fixed rather sadly upon the fire, forgetting apparently that there was any need for haste, till Lisa pointed to the hands of the clock, which were just upon the half-hour. She got up then, and began slowly to put on her dress.

‘Yes, it will be very pleasant,’ she said, after a pause; ‘very pleasant, indeed, when I once see him getting up his strength, and looking more as he used to do; but he is quite worn out now with pain and looks so old and haggard, that it makes my heart ache to see him. And sometimes I wonder, Lisa, whether they have told us right—whether he ever will be strong and well again, or——’ She stopped suddenly, and Lisa looked at her, hardly comprehending what she meant. She had no time, however, for remarks or questionings, for the dinner-bell rang at that moment, and Mary, recovering herself by a strong effort, finished the rest of her toilet in haste and left the room.

‘Thank you, dear, for helping me,’ she said as she went away; ‘and the sooner you can finish drying your hair and come down, the better. We shall not be long at dinner to-day.’

The door closed upon her, and Lisa, left once more to herself, sat down upon a low stool in front of the fire, and took up a book, as if she were going to read; but as she held the volume upside down, most probably she was not much the wiser for its contents. Her thoughts were running instead upon her cousin Percy, and while thinking of him, her eye turned to a certain picture, belonging to Mary, and which hung over the piano on the opposite side of the room. It was the likeness of a young officer in the dress of the engineers, and it was from that alone that Lisa had been able to form any idea of the cousin whose acquaintance she was about to make. He had been absent from England when she first came to live at the Priory, and the only time that he had ever been at home since, she had happened to be staying with friends in London; and as he had been ordered abroad suddenly, soon after the breaking out of the Crimean war, they had never met. She knew nothing of him but what she had heard from Mary and her other cousins, and the sort of acquaintance she had made with him from contemplating that likeness every morning for several years, while going through her major and minor scales, and other exercises which she knew

so thoroughly that she had no need to give her thoughts to them. Beyond the fact, however, of having looked at it as she would have looked at anything else hanging there during a wearisome occupation, she had never regarded it with much interest until she found she was likely to know the original. Then she had studied it with great curiosity, not only during her practising hours, but at other times also ; and the opinion she had arrived at was by no means favourable for her cousin. She did not like him. He was plain—very plain—to begin with, and she never liked such very plain people—they were always disagreeable. That deep-set eye and contracted brow were not prepossessing, and there was something hard and determined about his mouth, and in those thin compressed lips, which gave her the idea that his temper was not to be trusted. If there had not been a certain likeness to Mary in his face, she would have disliked him extremely ; as it was, she did not exactly do that, but she was sure that she did not care to know him. She wished he would have stayed away a little longer—that he had not been obliged to come home at all while she was there ; and in her dislike to going into the drawing-room, where she knew she must meet him, she sat lingering over the comfortable fire up-stairs until a peremptory message from her aunt summoned her to go down, with the pleasant reflection, as she did so, that she was certain to receive a reprimand for not having made her appearance sooner.

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## CHAPTER III.

## LE ALAFRÉ.

It was a popular tradition at the Priory that Lisa did not know how to walk, and whether this were true or not, certain it is it was an art which she practised very little. She ran, danced, jumped, and skipped ; but a sober walk was a thing in which she seldom indulged, and only in cases of absolute necessity, when she had no choice in the matter. Upon receiving her aunt's message, she twisted up her hair in a great hurry, and went flying off down-stairs in her usual fashion, running from the top to the bottom at full speed, and clearing the four or five lower steps at a jump—a not very safe proceeding, for the hall and stairs were highly polished, and a slip on her part might have entailed a broken limb or a sprained ankle.

But she had always been accustomed to come down in this way, and did it as a matter of course; and she was much surprised now, as she was stooping to look for a thimble which she had dropped in her haste, to hear some one close beside her say,—

‘Rather dangerous work that, Susan. I hope it is not your usual way of coming down-stairs.’

‘Susan! I’m not Susan!’ she exclaimed, raising her head in some astonishment, and wondering for the moment who could have made such a mistake. A single glance showed her that it was a stranger—her cousin Percy, of course, as she remembered directly afterwards—and recalling her late meditations with regard to him, and the dislike with which she had looked forward to making his acquaintance, she got up in no little confusion. He was standing at the dining-room door, which was close to the foot of the staircase, and as their eyes met, he seemed almost as much surprised as herself.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, after a moment’s pause, during which she was quite uncertain whether to stay or run away; ‘I beg your pardon: I thought it was Susan coming down. You have not hurt yourself, I hope.’

Perhaps he was not accustomed to seeing young ladies of sixteen flying about in such an off-hand fashion, and although Lisa was quite unconscious of having compromised the dignity of her age, she felt that this was not exactly the way in which she would have liked to be introduced to this very formidable cousin, and her colour rose a little.

‘No, thank you, I am not hurt,’ she said hastily; ‘I was only looking for something I dropped. It was my thimble—but I have found it now.’

She produced it as if in demonstration of the fact, and was turning away when he stopped her.

‘As there is no one else to do it, I think we must introduce ourselves. We are cousins, are we not? You are——’

He paused, as if he still had his doubts whether the very young-looking girl before him, with so much of the child about her, could possibly be the cousin whom he had perhaps pictured to himself. But he was not left long in uncertainty, for she looked up in some surprise at his hesitation.

‘Yes, you are quite right. I am Lisa—Lisa Kennedy. And you are my cousin Percy,’ she was about to have added, but the name sounded too familiar, and she corrected herself.

‘And you are Captain Tennent, of course. I knew you directly I saw you, and I thought you knew me.’ It was said so simply that it would have provoked a smile from most people, but there was not the shadow of one upon his face.

‘I was not sure,’ he said, gravely; ‘but as we know each other now, I suppose we may shake hands?’

‘I suppose we may,’ Lisa said, rather shyly, taking the hand he held out. He was so different to any one else at the Priory, and was so much taller and older looking than she had ever imagined, that she was wofully afraid of him; and as they walked across the hall together towards the drawing-room, she felt such a tiny, insignificant creature by his side, that her trepidation increased tenfold. She would have liked to make a rush, and gain the door of the room without him, but it would have seemed unkind, for she noticed that he walked with difficulty, and was obliged to use a stick; and to run away and leave him under the circumstances was impossible. The transit across the hall, however, appeared a perfect journey to her, and she was infinitely relieved when the drawing-room was reached, and he held the door open for her to pass.

‘Thank you,’ and without venturing to look at him, she slipped into the room, feeling very happy to be sheltered amongst numbers, and thinking even a scolding from her aunt preferable to being alone with such a very tall, grave-looking person. But Mrs Tennent happened to be writing a note, for which a servant was waiting, and contented herself with, ‘You are very late to-night, Lisa. What has kept you so long?’ as her niece passed her; and Lisa, glad to escape so easily, murmured an excuse of some sort and then stole away; and finding an empty chair by Arthur’s side at a distant table, sat down there with her work. She would have liked to join Mary, who was sitting near the fire on the other side of the room, but Percy had taken possession of a sofa in the same neighbourhood, and she thought she would rather be away from him. She felt more at her ease where she was, and was not sorry to find herself in a position where she could make her observations without fear of notice on his part. She had scarcely seen him in the hall; the glance she had taken at him there had not told her much, and she was anxious to see whether he at all resembled the picture she had been studying so long. A very short inspection was sufficient to assure her of the truth of the general likeness, for the features were undoubtedly the same; but years of service, and much illness and hardship, had not tended

to soften or improve a face which, even with youth and freshness to recommend it, had never prepossessed her in its favour ; and if she had thought the Percy Tennent with whom she was familiar most decidedly plain-looking, the original by no means disabused her of that idea. Sunburnt, and worn, and thin, without even the advantage of a pleasing smile or expression to redeem his features from their natural harshness, there was little in him to attract—much to repel ; and when, after long observation, she finally settled down into her first conviction that he was not only plainer than anybody she had ever seen, but as harsh and as unpleasing as he looked, she was but sharing a very general opinion. There were some who thought differently, but not people who met him casually ; and Lisa, like many others, went by first impressions, and made up her mind accordingly that she could never like him. He lay back in a corner of the sofa on which he had established himself, and took no part in what was going on around him ; and although he had a paper in his hand, it seemed to serve him more as an excuse for not speaking than anything else, for he did not appear to read much of it. Pain and weariness were written in every line of his face ; but though Lisa was sorry for him, and more sorry still for Mary, of whose anxieties she could now understand something, she did not feel inclined to reverse her unfavourable opinion, and as she sat watching him very earnestly, her countenance betrayed in no small degree what was passing in her mind. A low, smothered laugh from Arthur interrupted her meditations and made her look round.

‘ Well, Lisa, what’s the result of your investigations ? You’ve studied him long enough, and must know him by heart. Is he handsome—the Adonis you want for your hero ? ’

‘ Handsome ! He’s ugly—positively ugly ! ’ Lisa exclaimed. ‘ Who would think he was Mary’s brother ? You never told me he was so very bad looking, Arthur, that I was going to see anybody so really and truly ugly. ’

‘ Of course not. How could I tell you would think him so ? People have different tastes, and for anything I knew, you might have admired him very much. ’

I am sure you never thought anything of the sort ! ’ exclaimed Lisa, indignantly. ‘ He really is ugly—there can be no doubt about it. The only thing that can be said for him is, that he looks like a gentleman ; but that can’t prevent his being very, *very* plain. He has black hair, too, and black eyebrows, which I

particularly detest. And what is that scar on his forehead? Is that a Crimean decoration?’

‘Crimean? no; it was there the last time he was here. I don’t know how he got it. It’s an honourable one, I’ve no doubt.’

‘Very likely; but it don’t improve him. I shall call him Le Balafré—it will be a good name for him. Is that the reason why he wears his hair so low—to try and hide it? Well, he does contrive to make himself frightful. And I think he must be blind, by the way he shuts his eyes when he looks at things. Altogether, I don’t like him, Arthur—I don’t like his looks at all.’

‘Don’t you? That’s a pity, because I am afraid he can’t alter them. And allow me to remark, Miss Lisa, that you ought not to be so unreasonable as to dislike people for what they can’t help. I thought you had more sense than to go by looks only.’

‘That’s right,’ said Lisa, with a laugh; ‘I always like to have one of your moral reflections, Arthur. I begin to fancy, then, what sort of sermons you will preach some day, and I am very anxious to hear them.’

‘Are you? Well, it’s a pleasure I’ve no doubt you’ll have. And I’ll tell you what, when I’m hard up for a subject, I’ll take our present one to discourse upon. It would make a first-rate sermon with proper handling. Never judge by appearances. I declare I’ll make a note of it, and when it’s preached you shall be one of the congregation, and remember that it’s meant for your edification.’

‘Very well,’ said Lisa, looking delighted. ‘But it must be preached in this church, or I’m afraid I shall run a chance of not hearing it.’ And then changing her tone: ‘But you don’t understand what I mean about people being ugly, and my not liking them for it. You say they can’t help it, but I am sure they can; for it isn’t bad features only that make a person plain. It is expression; and every one can give themselves a pleasant expression if they like: if they don’t, it must be because they’ve nothing pleasant in them.’

‘I see, most sapient philosopher. But then if good looks depend upon expression, they depend of course upon the mood in which each individual finds himself. So a man who goes to bed very amiable and handsome, may get up in the morning out of temper or out of spirits, and very ugly—or *vice versa*.



And then don't you see what you come to? For if such transformations take place in other men, why not in Le Balafré? There's no reason why he should not turn out as handsome as anybody, for he's not by any means the Caliban you take him for. Barring a little pride and a little hot blood, no one can find much fault with him.'

'Proud and hot tempered!' exclaimed Lisa, triumphantly; 'I knew it. Those very thin lips are always a sign of bad temper. And his way of carrying himself shows he is proud. Any one can see that.'

'Military drill!' said Arthur, with a laugh. 'You are prejudiced, if you can't let a man walk as he likes without setting him down as proud. But you'll change your mind some day. What do you bet, that when I come home in June, I don't find you and Le Balafré fast friends, and you swearing that there "never was nobody" like him in the whole wide world? Come, let's have a wager. What shall it be? Half-a-dozen pair of white gloves, or'——

'Or nothing. I wouldn't take it. How fond you are of your bets, Arthur. It is not at all proper for a clergyman that is to be; and this is such a ridiculous one. I won't take advantage of you; I'll be generous, and spare your pocket, for I'm sure you've no money to throw away on white gloves, or anything else.'

'Never mind, that's my look-out, not yours. You take the bet, and I'll risk the gloves. Moreover, so sure and certain do I feel of not having to pay them, that if you like I'll make it a dozen instead of half. What do you say to that?'

'Lisa,' said Mrs Tennent, from the other end of the room, 'I don't think that work of yours is getting on very fast. Pray don't sit there looking at your needle and never putting in a stitch. No doubt your conversation is interesting, but if you can't work as well as talk, you had better change your seat.'

Lisa's head went down at this speech, and her needle began to fly in and out with astonishing rapidity; while Arthur shrugged his shoulders privately, and Susan, who had been an attentive, though unnoticed, listener to what was passing, remarked in an audible voice,—

'They were talking about betting. Arthur wants Lisa to have a wager about Percy, because she says'——

'Susan, hold your tongue,' exclaimed Arthur, in such a peremptory tone that Susan looked scared. 'What does it

matter to you what we were talking about? you were not asked to listen. Little pitchers have no business with long ears, and if they've the misfortune to have them, they've no right to have long tongues too. Be off with you. I want to read.' And throwing himself back in his chair, and stretching out his legs at full length, he took up a book, while Susan walked away, looking injured, and Lisa went off into a merry, though subdued, laugh over her work. Happening, however, to raise her eyes again, she encountered the fixed gaze of her cousin Percy, who had evidently been watching her for some time. He dropped his glass and took up his paper as their eyes met, but not before Lisa was aware of the scrutiny to which she had been subjected. Resenting it, in her fashion, she pushed her chair out of sight, and relapsed into total silence. For the remainder of the evening no one again heard the sound of her voice.

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## CHAPTER IV

### WHAT LISA THINKS OF HER COUSIN.

'GOOD-BYE, Scaramouch,' said Arthur, as he was standing in the hall on the following day, waiting for his uncle, who was going to drive him to the station, 'good-bye, Scaramouch; and so you won't take my wager after all. Do you know, though, what I've serious thoughts of doing? and that is of asking Le Balafre to take you in hand. Perhaps he may be able to effect a reformation in one or two particulars, and I'm sure we should all feel grateful to him for so doing.'

Lisa, a deplorable figure as usual from ink, a torn dress, and untidy hair, stopped short in the middle of a dance which she was performing round the table with Georgie, and looking at him for a moment, broke into a little scornful laugh.

'I should like to see him interfering with me! Don't you put him up to that, Arthur, or I'll never speak to you again, or to him either. There's no need I should quarrel with him, though I don't like him. Let us alone, if you please, and don't make me angry for nothing.'

'Very well, my fair cousin,' said Arthur, looking at her raised colour and sparkling eyes with a smile. 'I leave you to your own devices then, hoping that some day you will see the error of your ways and mend them. And your dress, too,' he added,

pointing to it; 'there won't be much of it left soon if you don't mind. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye!' exclaimed Lisa, springing forward, her momentary anger having vanished. 'O Arthur, I'm so sorry you are going! We've had such fun this Christmas, and it will be so stupid when you are away! Can't you come at Easter and not wait till June? Do say you will, and then I shall have something to look forward to.'

Arthur gave a whistle. 'I don't see how I can. It's such a long journey for such a short time. No, I don't think I shall leave Cambridge at all. I mean to read hard, and get myself thoroughly stupefied; and when summer comes, I shall run down here to be knocked into life again. We'll have more fun then, and Nelly will join us I've no doubt, as she'll be safe from the snowballing.'

Elinor, to whom this was addressed, paused as she was passing through the hall.

'Perhaps so—I don't know. I have not much time for that kind of thing, and I don't care for it either. Oh dear, how cold it is! How long is that door going to be open, Fred? Can't you shut it till they are ready?'

'It's no use,' shouted Fred, 'here's papa!' And Dr Tennent, who had just been dismissing a patient, making his appearance from his consulting-room, a general shaking of hands and good-byes followed; and off went Arthur.

'Till June! What an immense time!' sighed Lisa to herself as she went up-stairs, feeling very dull; and having deposited little George in the nursery, she walked off to Mary's room to get some consolation. It was a place where she was sure to find it in all her troubles, and kneeling down by the fire, she poured out her lamentations to Mary, who had been writing when she came in, but put away her letters when she found her cousin wanted her attention, and listened very sympathisingly to all she had to tell of the pleasures of the last few weeks. They had a long talk together, which had the effect of restoring Lisa to her accustomed spirits, though she could not help winding up with another sigh at Arthur's departure, and the remark that 'it was a pity, a very great pity, that he was obliged to go.'

'So it is,' said Mary, good-naturedly; 'he is very pleasant, and I like him very much. But after all, Lisa, one can't spend one's whole life in amusement. And he will have to work hard by and by, so that it's only right he should be getting ready for

it now; and he couldn't do that if he stayed here. Besides, I think you won't be sorry yourself to begin again regularly: you would tire in time of nothing but fun and pleasure.'

'I don't know that,' said Lisa, rather doubtfully; 'I never have tired of it yet, and I don't fancy I ever should. I suppose, though, Mary,' she added, with a smile, 'I suppose that means you would like to see me set to work? You think I have been idle quite long enough?'

Mary smiled too. 'Something of the sort certainly. From a good many signs in the room, I should say there was a great deal to be done. Your German books look as if they had not been opened since I went away; and I came across a French exercise in that drawer just now hardly begun. To-morrow is Madame Ricard's day, you know, and I'm afraid you are not ready for her.'

'No, that I'm sure I'm not. The old crosspatch! Don't scold, Mary dear; she really is cross, and the last time she was here she was particularly so. She gave me such quantities to write that I was in despair, so I just shut the books up and have never looked at them since. But I will now. I'll begin at once and work very hard, and that will make the days go faster. I can always work when you are here, because you keep me up to it.' And Lisa, whose industrious moods generally came by fits and starts, jumped up from her kneeling posture and was making a rush to the drawer in question when Mary stopped her.

'I think, dear, before you begin it would be quite as well to go and look at yourself in the glass. You surely can have no idea what a figure you are. I never remember seeing you so untidy, and if it is the holidays which have brought you to such a state, I must say I think it's no bad thing they are over.'

She spoke so gravely that Lisa looked rather ashamed. 'Am I so untidy?' she said. 'I didn't know it. Arthur said something, too; but then he is always teasing me about my dress. Am I really very bad?'

'Yes, very bad—very untidy, indeed. And really, dear Lisa, that is one thing in which you have not improved at all lately. Even Percy noticed this morning how untidy you were, and asked me if you always went about in that way. He dislikes exceedingly to see people careless and slovenly in their dress; and I was rather sorry that you, my eldest pupil, should have taken so little trouble to look neat.'

Lisa coloured, and for some minutes stood twisting a piece

of thread in her fingers without making any answer. But she looked up presently.

‘Very well, Mary, I’ll go if you like, and try what I can do; but (in a very doleful voice) ‘I really don’t see that it is of much use, for I *cannot* keep myself tidy, do what I will. My things are very unfortunate; they are like nobody else’s. They *will* tear and they *will* come to pieces; and all my hooks and eyes and buttons come off, and all my hair-pins tumble out; and I lose everything and never find anything again, so how I am to be neat I can’t tell; I suppose it’s my fault—everybody says so, but I don’t know how to be different. And you say now I am worse than ever, and that is very disheartening, because I had been—well, no, I can’t say that exactly, for I don’t think I’ve thought much about it lately. But I’ll begin again now. I’ll try to please you.’ And as if impelled by fresh energy, she gave two or three hops towards the door, but paused before she reached it.

‘Mary, there’s one thing I should like to say if you don’t mind.’

‘Well, dear?’ And Mary looked up from the writing she was beginning again.

‘I hope you won’t care very much—I mean I hope you won’t be disappointed or vexed if—if I don’t particularly like Percy. As he is your brother, I ought to like him, but’——

‘But you don’t. I am not so unreasonable, Lisa, as to expect you to like him before you know him. You have had no time yet to make his acquaintance.’

‘Yes, but when I do know him, I mean,’ persisted Lisa. ‘Will you be very much vexed then if I don’t like him?’

‘Not in the least,’ said Mary, with a smile; ‘you are quite at liberty to like him or not without any fear of vexing me. I suppose, though, as you say that, you think there is no chance of your doing so.’

‘Not much,’ said Lisa, balancing herself on one foot, as she often did, when she was meditating. ‘He’s not like you, Mary,’ she added after a pause.

‘No, not at all. At least not in most things. I believe he is in a few.’

‘In face I meant,’ said Lisa; ‘he’s not half so good-looking as you are. In fact, Mary, I hope you don’t mind my saying it, but I don’t think him good-looking at all.’

Mary laughed. ‘No more do I, Lisa. Though he is my

own brother and I love him very dearly, I have never thought him good-looking; but I know him so well and love him so much, that I only think of what he is himself, and if he were twice as plain as he is, he would do well enough for me. It would make no difference in my love for him.'

Lisa made no answer to this, her private opinion being that no one could possibly be plainer than Percy was already—as for being twice as plain, that was out of the question; but she did not say so, and after balancing herself very dexterously on her one foot for a few moments longer, she went away, remarking as she left the room:

'Well, I'm glad, Mary, you won't feel hurt if I don't like him. I was afraid you would, and I should be so sorry to vex you. I am very sorry, too, that you were ashamed of me this morning. I'll go and make myself tidy, and see if I can't keep so, to please you.'

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## CHAPTER V.

### MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

'O MARY! such fun! We've been to Copelands this afternoon. Mr Pye has a new hunter, such a beauty! And one of the cows has a calf, and three of the hens are sitting, and there will be some chickens in a day or two; and the old drake'——

Lisa stopped short in the midst of her list of attractions to be found at Copelands, for she discovered that her cousin was not alone as she had expected. Percy was with her, and Mrs Tennent also; and it was the latter's look of displeasure which brought the above speech to an abrupt conclusion. Lisa indeed had certain vague notions that she was not exactly in a presentable state, and when she found who was there, would have been glad to make her escape again; but as this was impossible, she thought it best to appear unconcerned, and stood where she was, playing with an immense bunch of primroses she had in her hand. Anything more exquisitely lovely than she looked at that moment it would have been difficult to imagine. The high March wind had raised her colour and blown her light-brown wavy hair about her face, and her dark eyes were spark-

ling half with pleasure, half with mischief, as she raised a furtive glance to her aunt to discover what was coming.

‘I wish, Lisa, you would learn to come into a room more like a lady, instead of rushing in in that wild way. Pray shut the door directly, and then tell me what you have been doing to make yourself such a figure. Have you been in the pond, child, to get so dreadfully wet?’ She looked angrily at the half-dried mud and green duck-weed clinging to her niece’s skirts and boots, and Lisa appeared somewhat dismayed as she took in the whole extent of the damage done to her dress. She walked to the door, however, and closed it, and then came back, pulling on her hat, which the wind had blown off, and pushing back her hair.

‘I’m very sorry, Aunt Helen, but I couldn’t help it,’ she began.

‘Of course not; you never can help anything,’ rejoined Mrs Tennent. ‘But if you can’t, I should like to know who can. What were you doing, I should like to know? Nothing that was proper for a young lady, I am sure.’

Lisa glanced at Percy, who would have left the room, but that they were standing too near the door to allow him easy egress, so he could only look unconscious, and keep his eyes on the page before him.

‘It was the wind,’ she said. ‘My hat was blown off, and I had to run across some fields after it. A man tried to catch it for me, but he let it go again, and he couldn’t run so fast as I did; so when it was blown into a ditch I got there first; and I jumped down into a lot of water—I didn’t know there was any there; it all looked green and dry. It was great fun!’ she added, with a sparkle in her eyes, forgetting for the moment the awe inspired by her aunt’s presence.

‘Indeed! I am sorry to hear it. I should not have thought carelessness could be fun at any time: and you must have been extremely careless to let your hat go in that way. And nobody but yourself would have dreamed of jumping into a ditch, without looking to see if there were water in it or not. I am very much displeased with you, Lisa; but of course that is nothing to you. You will be sorry though, a few years hence, that you have not tried to please me more. If you have any right feeling, that is; but really I doubt if you have, or you would not give me the annoyance you do.’

And Mrs Tennent, in a state of high displeasure, walked from

the room, leaving Lisa almost blinded with the tears which the latter words had called forth.

‘Is that true, Mary?’ she said, raising her head, and speaking with a sob. ‘Is that true? Have I no right feeling at all? And she came to the back of her cousin’s chair, and flung her arms round her neck; ‘I didn’t know I had done anything so very bad. You are not angry with me as well as Aunt Helen are you?’ she said in an imploring tone; and then, as some movement from Percy recalled her to a sense of his presence, she loosed her hold of her cousin quickly, and stood up again, with deepening colour and embarrassed look. ‘I brought these flowers for you, Mary,’ she said, holding out the primroses. ‘I got them for you in the woods; I thought you would like them.’ And, laying them down upon the table, she rushed away without looking round again.

There were no traces of tears in Lisa’s bright eyes the next time Percy saw her. Childlike, she had thrown off all thought of trouble, and she sang and danced with Georgie in the back drawing-room that evening, as she always did, and looked as if she had never known a care in her life. She was paler than usual, certainly; but there was good reason for that, for sundry sneezing and shivering fits betokened very plainly a coming cold; and nobody would have wondered at this, had it been generally known, that she had sat on the brick floor of Mrs Pye’s wash-house for nearly an hour that afternoon in her wet clothes, helping to put peppercorns down the throats of several ducklings that had been just hatched. Of course she had never thought of the probable effects of sitting so long in a damp dress and soaked boots; and as Mrs Tennent was not in the habit of coddling her children, or making much of small ailments, very little notice was taken of her present symptoms. She was sent to bed rather earlier than usual, and told to ask Lane to give her something warm; but meeting her favourite, the white cat, as she was going up-stairs, she stayed to have a game with it, and when she reached the nursery forgot to give her message, sitting down with the nurse instead, to a supper of bread and cheese, and going to her own room much later than usual.

She came down the next day with very heavy eyes, and evidently far from well; but as she talked and laughed, and rushed about the house with undiminished spirits, no one paid much attention to her looks. Percy perhaps was the only person who perceived anything amiss, though he did not say much till



the afternoon, when, to his great astonishment, she made her appearance in the drawing-room, ready equipped for a walk, and come to ask her aunt's permission for them all to go to tea at Copelands.

Copelands was a small farm about two miles from Atherstone. It belonged to Dr Tennent, and was let by him to a respectable man and his wife, with whom the younger members of the Priory were on a most friendly footing. Mr and Mrs Pye had no children of their own, and were very fond of young people. They liked nothing better than to have visits from the doctor's family, to whom the farm offered numberless attractions. The pleasures of playing in the barn and out-houses, visiting the stables, milking the cows, and chasing unlucky fowls and pigs, were irresistible, nor did Lisa consider herself by any means too old for such amusements. Going to tea with Mrs Pye when they sat in the sanded kitchen in very high-backed, hard, uncomfortable chairs, at a white deal table, and ate off pewter plates, but always with the best of cheer before them (for the good lady was very proud of her home-made bread, her cakes, cream and butter), was to Lisa a pleasure which she would not have missed for a good deal. She had not a thought now for colds or coughs, or anything else, and although there was an east wind blowing, and the sky was clouding over as if some heavy showers might be expected, she did not seem to think these any reasons for staying at home. Her only fear appeared to be lest her aunt should remember her carelessness of the day before, but Mrs Tennent was deep in a new book, and gave the desired permission without raising her eyes. In high glee Lisa was turning away, when Percy stopped her.

'You surely are not going out such a day as this, and with that bad cold upon you, Lisa. You have no idea how damp and raw it is.'

Lisa looked excessively annoyed. 'Aunt Helen says I may go. It won't hurt me. Please don't keep me,' she exclaimed, in an agony of impatience, and trying to pass him as he stood with his hand upon the door. But it was too late. Mrs Tennent's attention had been caught.

'I forgot your cold, Lisa; Percy is right, it won't do for you to go. Susan and Constance may if they like, but you will be much better at home.'

'O Aunt Helen, it won't hurt me; my cold is nothing. Do let me go,' she exclaimed, entreatingly.

‘Certainly not,’ said Mrs Tennent, taking up her book again. ‘Go and take off your bonnet at once, and don’t let me hear another word about it.’

Lisa retired. When her aunt spoke in that way, she knew well enough it was useless to say more, and she left the room in a grievous state of disappointment. In the hall she came again upon Percy, and then her anger blazed forth.

‘Thank you, Captain Tennent, for stopping my pleasure,’ she said, scornfully, as she passed him. ‘I am much obliged to you for your interference.’

He turned round. ‘But Lisa’—

Lisa, however, had no intention of listening to anything he had to say. With the angry colour in her cheek, and a flash in her eye, she stamped her foot at him, and went off like an arrow from a bow. He heard her fleet step up the stairs and along the passage, and then a distant door was flung to with great violence, and a dead silence followed. She had taken refuge in her own room, and there, in a very stormy mood, she paced up and down, until her wrathful feelings began to work themselves off, and then she walked to the window and looked out. A shower had come on, and the rain was dripping heavily from the eaves of the house and among the leafless lime-trees close by. She stood there and watched until it passed off, and a gleam of sunlight came out again upon the green lawn, and sparkled on the glistening rain-drops that hung from the boughs above her window; and then she pictured to herself the sloping meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. ‘It was provoking of him, very provoking,’ she said to herself; ‘she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home to interfere with her;’ and, with her angry feelings towards him not much diminished, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

The cold which Lisa had taken proved a severe one, and hung about her for a long time. For two or three days she was confined to her own room, and even when she was well enough to come down-stairs again, she was kept a prisoner to the house by her uncle’s advice. A most refractory patient she proved

herself, always running about the cold passages, or slipping into the garden when unobserved; and how she scrambled into health again was a perfect marvel. But she did, and when, one fine morning in April, she went out legitimately for the first time, she was almost wild with delight, racing up and down the green walk under the lime-trees with her skipping-rope, while old Bär, the great shaggy house-dog, lounged after her in a state of lazy satisfaction. She danced, and ran, and skipped, until she appeared to have tired herself out, and then she sat down upon one of the lower steps of a ladder standing against the garden wall, and began to sing. Her voice was low, but true and sweet, and as she sat looking up into the April sky of clouds and blue above her head, she was not aware of the pleasure her performance was giving to some one else besides herself and Bär. In the middle of 'Auld Robin Gray,' she became aware that she was not alone. With his back against a tree close by, stood her cousin Percy, and her face flushed as she caught sight of him. She sat upright at once, with a look half shy, half defiant.

'I am not disturbing you, am I?' he asked.

'Not in the least; you have as good a right to be here, I suppose, as I have.'

'If I am not disturbing you, why should you let me stop your singing? You were giving me great pleasure, Lisa.'

'Was I?' Her eye danced, though she looked very grave.

'You are tired, I suppose?'

'No, not at all—only I don't care to go on now.' The air and tone were too unmistakably childish for him to take the rebuff in the spirit in which it was intended. She could almost have fancied, indeed, that he smiled.

'Do you never care to amuse your friends?' he said, quietly.

'*My friends*—yes. But they never ask me to sing; I have never learnt, so nobody wants to hear me.'

'Never learned! Then I am sure you ought to take lessons. It would be a great pity not to cultivate your voice.'

Lisa pouted a little. She hated anything like application, and had done battle with every master and mistress in turn before a fresh accomplishment had been forced upon her. What business of Percy's was it whether she learned singing or not? Did he want to shut her up in the house all day, and not let her enjoy herself at all in the sunshine and among the trees? The mere thought of such a thing made her pout again, and

she sat and eyed her cousin with suspicious looks, and said to herself that she should be very glad if he were in the trenches before Sebastopol again. There was no chance of his return there, however, as she knew well enough. Particulars of the treaty that had been signed at Paris had come that very morning; she had heard nothing else talked of at the breakfast table, and all Atherstone was ringing with the news of peace. He would not go away now, she was afraid, and she was very sorry. Her next words betrayed what was passing in her mind, for, instead of replying to his remark about her singing, she said abruptly:

‘I don’t think I’m very glad the war is over. I don’t like people to meddle with me, and—I suppose you won’t go back to the Crimea at all now?’

‘I believe not.’ He came forward as he spoke, and laid his hand upon the ladder, which, during her previous meditations, she had gradually been mounting backwards.

‘What’s that for? Why are you holding it?’ she asked in great surprise. ‘It’s quite steady.’

‘Not very—I think, too, you don’t know what you are doing. Are you not afraid of going so high?’

‘Afraid?’ She read his face. ‘Why don’t you say what you mean—that you think I am too old to be climbing ladders—that it isn’t lady-like to do such things? But I don’t care. I like doing them, and I am not at all afraid,’ and she gave such a spring upon the ladder, that he felt glad he was there to prevent its coming down. ‘I am only a child yet, and I don’t want to be anything else. I like to run about, and to climb and jump, and do twenty things which are not proper for young ladies. And I can’t bear sitting in-doors all day learning lessons, which never do any good, but only make my head ache. That’s what you want me to do, I know; you are as bad as Aunt Helen. I won’t, though. I shall do just as I like about everything, and never ask your leave for anything.’

With which assertion she turned round suddenly, and the next moment, to his utter astonishment, she was standing on the top of the high wall which separated the Priory garden from the adjoining churchyard. It was not a safe place, even for a firm foot and a clear head like hers, for, in addition to its great height and narrow dimensions, the stones in some places had given way with the late frosts; but the movement was so unexpected, that Percy had no time to prevent it; he could only

stand and expostulate. She evidently enjoyed his dismay, and laughed when he talked of danger, and the risk of a false step ; and when he begged her to come down she laughed still more.

‘As if I could fall ! Why, I’ve been up here hundreds of times. There’s a nice little seat at the other end among the trees, and I come and sit up there in summer. Fall, indeed ! I wonder how I could !’ and she executed a graceful little ‘pas de seul !’ on the very edge of the wall, finishing off with a swimming curtsy to him ; and then ran to coax down the white cat, whose head was seen peering over the roof of the coach-house. She came back a moment or two afterwards with her favourite in her arms, and fresh persuasion on her cousin’s part ensued to induce her to come down.

‘No, thank you. I don’t like being with you—you tease me. It’s much pleasanter up here. It isn’t proper, I know. It’s very *improper*, and I see by your face how very unladylike you think me ; but I don’t care. If you don’t like to see me standing here you needn’t look at me—you can go away.’

She walked, or rather danced off, and finding it useless to argue with her, he left her to herself, and walked away. But before going in-doors he went to the stable, to ask to have the ladder taken back when she came down, and kept for the future under the gardener’s care.

‘Not that it’s the least manner of use though, sir, for me to lock it up,’ said old Richard. ‘If Miss Lisa wants it, she’s sure to get hold of it. She gets everything she wants, and if she can’t get it any other way, she’ll watch till my back is turned, and then steal my keys. She’s up to anything, is Miss Lisa, and I can’t scold her, she comes over one so like.’

It is to be feared that Miss Lisa often came over him afterwards, for the ladder was frequently to be seen in its wrong place ; far more frequently than Percy was aware of. He, indeed, in his unsuspicion, most probably supposed it forgotten when safely housed in the stable, as he knew very little of the self-willed waywardness of the spirit with which he had to deal. Not that Lisa took any pains to conceal her real character from him. She seemed to take infinite delight in showing him how wilful and capricious she could be. She would hardly speak to him civilly sometimes, and at others was carelessly provoking and cool ; and as if to see how far she could go without stirring up the hot temper for which she had been told he was famous, she ventured upon a systematic course of small annoyances—hiding

his papers and books, abstracting his penknives, pocket compasses, mathematical instruments, or anything else on which she could lay her hands, hacking and cutting his pens, and breaking his pencil points—doing as much mischief, in short, as her ingenuity could devise, and then sitting by with the utmost gravity, while he repaired damages and instituted fruitless hunts for lost treasures.

Perhaps he did not guess who the culprit was, or perhaps politeness would not allow him to be angry with a lady; for as a lady, in spite of her indignant disclaimers to such a title, he persisted in treating Lisa; and although she said to herself that she was sure he looked very black at the outrages perpetrated, she never had the satisfaction of feeling quite certain that she had really roused the fiery spirit of which she had heard so much.

There was one way, however, in which she found that she could annoy him most seriously. He had very high ideas of what a woman ought to be, and nothing shocked him more than any approach to 'fast' or unfeminine conduct in a girl; and Lisa, who had read his looks rightly on the day she mounted the garden wall, saw his disapprobation afterwards of many things that she did. She was very angry, and to revenge herself, and for the pleasure of vexing him, she took care always to make the most of all her exploits; talked of swinging on five-barred gates at the farm, of mounting hay-ricks, and jumping hurdles with Fred and Charley; while she would never even let him guess how much she liked some other things of a less questionable character, because she had heard him mention them as proper tastes for a woman.

One of these was drawing, for in spite of its quiet nature, it so happened that this was a thing for which she had a particular fancy; but so resolved was she that he should not guess her predilection for anything of the sort, that though longing to look at the many sketches he had made when abroad, she would never ask him to let her see them. Mary, who was one day turning over his Crimean drawings, and questioning him about them, perceived her hovering near, and made room for her to come and look too.

'You will like to see them, Lisa. Here are views of so many of the places we have heard of lately.'

But no. Although there was nothing Lisa would have liked better—for she had been listening with the deepest interest to all

that Percy was saying, yet she chose to appear indifferent. She drew back hastily, and put her hands behind her, as if something were about to be forced on her that she did not like.

‘No, thank you. I don’t care for them. They are very good, I daresay, but I don’t want to see them. I’ve something else to do.’ And she marched away, half sorry that her pride would not let her have such a pleasure, and yet half proud, too, of this self-same pride, which was unfortunately fated to bring her into collision with her cousin in a way which might have been attended with most disastrous consequences.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A WILFUL SPRITE.

ONE afternoon, some little time after, Percy happened to go over to Copelands on business for his father, and stayed when he had finished it to walk round the farm with Mr Pye. He was not aware that any of the party from the Priory were there, and was rather surprised in a distant meadow to come upon Lane with the two younger girls and Georgie, all harmlessly engaged in gathering cowslips. Not Lisa, however; she was not with them, nor did he see her anywhere near.

‘Oh, Lisa is riding,’ remarked Constance, in answer to his inquiries. ‘Here she is coming across the field.’ And in fact at that moment up cantered Lisa, mounted without saddle on Mr Pye’s fine hunter. There was no such thing in the house as a lady’s saddle, but that was nothing to her—she could ride as well, or better, without one; and fearless and high-spirited by nature, she delighted in a gallop on a horse as spirited as herself, and laughed at the idea of danger.

Mr Pye shook his head as she came up.

‘Ah, Miss Lisa, at it again! And you know it’s not right. I’ve told you over and over again that horse is too much for you. You’ll have an accident some day, and then you’ll be sorry you’ve not taken my advice and kept off his back.’

‘So you say every time I ride him,’ said Lisa, gaily. ‘The first day I got on you told me I should break my neck, but here I am in spite of all your prophecies. No, thank you,’ backing a little as he tried to persuade her to dismount, ‘I haven’t had my ride. I don’t mean to get down.’ And with a glance at

Percy, who seemed on the point of saying something, she gave the rein to her horse and cantered off again.

Mr Pye looked a little put out. 'That's the way with her, sir,' he said, turning to Percy. 'She's wilful-like, and will do as she pleases. Say what I will, I can't keep her off that horse, and it's not safe for her to be riding of him as she does. Her hand is not strong enough; and he has a bad trick of shying at times. I'm thinking of getting rid of him if I could find any one to give me my price—but that's a chance. I don't like to see Miss Lisa on him, but I can't stop her. Perhaps, sir, if you spoke to her she'd mind you, for if she's not stopped we shall have an accident sure enough.'

Percy's brow knitted. 'I will speak to her,' he said, as, with his glass up to his eye, he followed Lisa's movements at the other end of the meadow. 'She shall not do it again.'

He walked back to the house with the farmer, and waited until Lisa, who in the meantime kept carefully out of reach, had finished her ride, and chose to come back. She rode into the yard at a very leisurely pace, and looked at Mr Pye with a bright smile while she stroked and patted the horse's neck, and then she slipped down without taking any notice of her cousin who was coming up to offer his assistance. He examined the horse for a few moments in silence, and afterwards followed her as she was going into the house. He looked very grave, and probably she had her suspicions as to what was coming, for she kept as far away from him as possible while they walked up the garden, and appeared to be quite taken up with admiring the jonquils and anemones with which the borders were crowded.

'I am afraid you will have to give up your rides, Lisa,' he said at last. 'That horse is not meant for a lady, and it is not safe for you to be riding him. I hope you will not attempt it again.'

Lisa shrugged her shoulders a little pettishly.

'Thank you, I am not at all afraid. And I am quite able to take care of myself, Captain Tennent, without troubling you to look after me—much obliged to you all the same,' she added, ironically.

Percy bit his lip. 'If you are not afraid, Lisa, others must be for you; and for their sakes I must beg you to give up an amusement which is not safe. My father would not approve of these rides, I am sure, if he knew of them; nor would Mrs Tennent.'

Lisa laughed rather disdainfully. 'I am sorry you should be



disappointed, but I don't feel at all inclined to give them up. If they don't meet with your approval, it is a pity, but I can't help it. You must not expect me to consult your wishes in everything.'

'Not my wishes, but what is safe and proper. Your own good sense, Lisa, must tell you that you ought to give them up when you know they are not safe.'

'My own good sense tells me that you are extremely fond of interfering with me, Captain Tennent; and really I don't know who gave you the right to do it, or what concern it is of yours whether I chose to ride or not. Even if I like to break my neck, it will be no business of yours. When I want your advice I will ask for it; but until I do, perhaps you will be kind enough not to interfere.'

Percy looked grave. 'I have no wish to interfere with you in general,' he said, 'and I am sorry to be obliged to do so now. If you consider, though it is no business of mine, you can ask my father what he thinks about it; he has certainly a right to keep you out of danger, even if I have none.'

There was no answer to this. Lisa only raised her head a little, and walked on; and when they left the farm, she chose to loiter behind with Lane and Georgie, and let Susan and Constance get on as quickly as they liked with their brother. At the hall door, however, she found him again waiting for her.

'You were not serious in what you said just now, Lisa? You will give them up?' he said, as she was passing him.

'Give what up?' she asked, carelessly, and beginning to untie her bonnet-strings with a most provoking air of indifference. 'Oh, my rides, do you mean? How you do go on about them, to be sure! I thought we had done once, and now you are beginning again. Of course I don't intend to give them up; I told you so before.'

'And I am to speak to my father, then?'

'If you please. I don't care in the least what you do. Pray interfere as much as you like, if it will give you any pleasure.'

A queen could not have looked more dignified than did that little wilful beauty; and so pretty was she in her wilfulness, that, in spite of his annoyance, Percy's eye lingered on her admiringly. But he said no more, and with a proud step, and a curious smile on her face, she glided past him and disappeared up the staircase.

Lisa was surprised and anything but pleased to be told by her uncle at breakfast the next morning, that she must have nothing

more to do with Mr Pye's horse ; her rides must cease from that day forth. He spoke decidedly, and Mrs Tennent repeated the command, adding a good deal more, to which Lisa paid no attention. She was too angry to listen ; and although she said nothing, the look of defiance which she cast across the table at Percy spoke volumes. ' Did he think he was going to order her about, that he had only to give his commands and they were to be obeyed. But he was mistaken, and so he would find before long ! ' She dashed away the moment breakfast was over, and flew to Mary's room, where, happening to see some of Percy's drawings which had unfortunately been left there, she rushed on them in her childish rage, and, tearing them all into fragments, tossed them out of the window. She cooled down a little as she watched the last of them caught away by the wind and carried over the garden wall ; for she began to wonder whether she had not gone a little too far, and whether they were any that he cared about particularly. Whatever they had been, however, there was an end of them now ; and drawing a chair to the table, she began to scribble an exercise for Madame as the commencement of her morning studies.

Two days after that, Percy was once more at Copelands, and, not finding Mr Pye near the house, set off across some meadows in search of him. He was standing under some trees on the banks of a stream, looking round with his glass to see if the farmer were near, when the sound of horse's hoofs coming rapidly up on the turf on the opposite side made him turn. It was not without a misgiving that he did so, and his first glance told him that his suspicions were correct. It was no other than Lisa who was there, and who, without seeing him, cantered up and down for some minutes on the high bank on the other side of the brook. Percy's brow clouded as he watched her ; and when, still unaware of his presence, she suddenly put her horse to a gallop, and cleared the stream close to the place where he stood, he walked forward with an air of cool and resolute determination, and laid his hand on her bridle. His unlooked-for appearance took her by surprise, and her colour rose for a moment. She speedily recovered herself, however.

' Good morning, Captain Tennent,' she said with a smile, ' I didn't expect to see you here. Did you come to prevent my ride ? Because if so, I am sorry to say you are too late. I have been out for more than an hour, and have enjoyed myself exceedingly.'

'You are mistaken, Lisa; my coming had nothing to do with you. After what my father said the other day, I did not think my interference would have been necessary again. I thought his wishes would have been quite enough, without'——

'His wishes; yours, you mean,' retorted Lisa, scornfully, 'I should have had my rides in peace; I should have heard nothing from him, if you had not interfered. And very kind it was of you, I must say. Let me go, if you please,' with a little impatient flourish of her whip. 'You needn't stand with your hand there, for I mean to have my ride out.'

'Lisa, this is trifling—mere childishness. You must get down.' Her eyes began to flash.

'*Must!* How dare you say "*must*" to me? Do you think I am going to obey *you*?'

'Not me—but my father. He wishes it, Lisa; he has forbidden these rides, and you ought to give them up.'

Her colour rose. '*Ought!* Yes, because *you* wish it. Don't talk of my uncle's wishes; he had none till you interfered. You must find some one else, Captain Tennent, to listen to your "*musts*" and your "*oughts*," for I won't. And now let me go.' She jerked at her bridle as she spoke, but his hand was firm upon it, and the only effect of the movement was to make her horse start and attempt to rear.

'It won't do, Lisa—you must get down.'

'You can't keep me if I don't wish to stay,' she exclaimed, growing still more excited. 'Let me go directly.' And caring little what she did to free herself, she raised her whip, and with all her force struck him so sharply across his ungloved hand that he was taken by surprise and let the bridle fall. It was only for a moment, and the next he attempted to catch it again, but he missed, and Lisa's ringing laugh was one of triumph at his failure.

'Ah, Captain Tennent, "*it won't do*,"' she said, repeating his words mockingly, 'you will have to go back alone, and I hope you'll enjoy the walk. Good-bye.' And she rode off.

But alas for poor Lisa! Her triumph was of short duration. Her laugh was still sounding in his ear, and her eyes were still dancing with glee at his discomfiture, when the report of a gun in a neighbouring wood startled her horse and made him shy suddenly. Riding carelessly as she was, it was a movement for which she was totally unprepared, and losing her balance she was flung to the ground, and lay there stunned and motionless.

It was not for many minutes ; Percy, who had seen the accident, had hardly time to reach the spot where she was lying, before her senses began to return, and although confused at first, she raised herself a little, and sat up. The sight of her cousin seemed to recal her to herself, for the colour came back to her face, and she turned away with an expression of evident annoyance.

‘I am not hurt,’ she said, coldly. ‘You needn’t look so frightened. There is nothing the matter with me.’ But the bewildered way in which she raised her hand to her head as she spoke, rather contradicted her assertion.

‘I don’t think you know yet whether you are hurt or not,’ Percy answered, gravely, but with a kindness that would have touched her, had she not been too much confused to notice it. ‘At any rate, you must not lie here : you must let me carry you back to the house, and then we shall find out what you have done. I hope, as you say, it is nothing.’

‘Thank you, I hope so too,’ said Lisa, not too much subdued even then to be ironical. ‘As for being carried, though, I am much obliged to you, but I prefer walking. I can do that quite as well as, if not better, than yourself.’ And she smiled a little, for her cousin’s habit of using a stick when he first came home had been a constant source of amusement to her, and even now he walked stiffly. He made no answer, and would have helped her to rise, but she pushed away his offered hand, and appeared quite offended at the idea of his supposing that she wanted any assistance. When she raised herself, however, with some difficulty, and tried to set her foot to the ground, the involuntary shudder and exclamation of pain that escaped her told where she was hurt ; and if Percy had not caught her, she would have fallen again. He saw she was nearly fainting ; and lifting her in his arms as he would have lifted a little child, he carried her back to the farm. She was not much more than a child, indeed, and very light ; and he had carried her into the house, and laid her on the large old-fashioned sofa in Mrs Pye’s kitchen, before she knew what was being done with her ; and then he took off her hat and fetched her some water, which brought the colour back to her face and did her good ; though the pain from her foot was growing worse, and she felt dizzy and bewildered. And then Mrs Pye herself came bustling in, all alarm at the accident, and suggesting remedies of every sort ; the worst of which, in Lisa’s opinion, she insisted upon ad-

ministering at once, namely, a large bottle of smelling salts—the very best thing, as she declared, for faintness. Lisa writhed at first under the infliction, and ended by pushing the bottle away in desperation; and then she implored to have her boot taken off—a work of difficulty, for her foot was swelling very fast, and she could hardly bear to have it touched. Mrs Pye was so afraid of giving pain that, in her very anxiety to avoid doing so, she gave far more than was necessary; but Percy came to the rescue, and in spite of Lisa's remonstrances, slit her boot open down the front with his pen-knife, and drew it off without more ado. The relief to her foot from the removal of the pressure was very great, but with the momentary cessation from pain came thoughts of what she would have to bear from her aunt's anger, when the accident was known at home. She threw herself back with an impatient gesture, and drew her foot away when her cousin would have liked to ascertain more particularly the extent of the injury, that something might be done to lessen the pain.

'Oh, no, leave me alone; don't touch me,' she exclaimed, pettishly. 'You hurt me and can do no good. You have done all you can and now you may go, and be quite happy that everything has happened as you said it would. It would have been a great pity if all your wise prophecies hadn't come to pass. And of course you are glad they have, if only to show how wise you are and how foolish I am. Ah, well, you may be as glad as you like; I shan't care,' she added, with fierce impatience, jerking herself backwards among the pillows which Mrs Pye had heaped up behind her.

'You are mistaken, Lisa; I am very sorry for you,' was all he said; and angry as she was, she was softened by the tone in which those few words were spoken. He turned away, and writing a few lines in pencil on a slip of paper, asked to have them taken to the Priory, and then made inquiries for Lane, who was somewhere about the farm. Mrs Pye went out in search of her, and, left alone with her cousin, Lisa felt no inclination to break the pause which followed. She was beginning to see that she had behaved very badly; and, between pain and self-reproach, she found it a hard matter to keep back her tears. She wished Percy would have found fault with her, that he would have said—no matter what, so that she could have had a pretext for being angry. Her spirit would have kept her up then; but to meet with pity when she deserved blame, and kindness instead of upbraiding, was what she had not expected, and she began to

feel very miserable, and very penitent. She lay back with her eyes closed, and there was a long silence, until she happened to look up and found Percy standing at the foot of the sofa, watching her so earnestly that he seemed to have forgotten where he was. He started as his eye met hers, and, as she turned her head away with a very weary sigh, he came up to her side and asked if there were nothing he could do for her.

‘No, nothing, thank you; but I should like—oh, I should like to go home. Uncle Henry would do something for this pain, I think, and’ —— Her voice faltered, and she had to bite her lip and clench her hands tightly to keep back the cry which was almost wrung from her. ‘When do you think I may go?’ she said, after a pause. ‘I don’t think I can bear this much longer.’

Percy took a turn across the room before he answered: ‘My father will be here in a short time, I expect—if he were at home, that is, when they got my note. If not, they will send the carriage for you. They are sure to be here in a few minutes.’

Lisa’s look was a very grateful one. ‘Thank you, I don’t mind it so much now. I didn’t know before what you had done.’ And she closed her eyes again and lay very patiently till Lane made her appearance, out of breath, and in an excited state at the account she had received from Mrs Pye of the accident. Lisa was her favourite, her peculiar pet among all her charges at the Priory; not even Georgie, whom she petted and spoiled to an unlimited extent, as old nurses only know how to do, not even he was half so much to her as was Lisa—Lisa who tormented her, and tyrannised over her, and gave her no end of trouble, and who was all the dearer to her, perhaps, on that very account. She came in now in a sad state, too much frightened even to give the scolding with which, in spite of her fondness, she would have greeted her darling at any other time; nor did Lisa’s pale face and evident suffering tend to reassure her, but as nothing could be done, she could only stand by and commiserate, until at last, to the relief of everybody, the carriage arrived. It was a disappointment that Dr Tennent did not come with it, but he was not at home, so the only thing was to get Lisa back as fast as possible. Percy accordingly carried her out, and having placed her in the carriage, and put Lane and Georgie in after her, he sent them off, promising to bring home the two little girls himself.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## ON THE SOFA.

LISA'S hurt proved to be the fracture of some of the small bones of the foot, besides several very bad contusions—rather a serious accident, her uncle seemed to think, though the wonder was, he said, that it was not much worse. She must make up her mind to be a prisoner for some time, or she might lame herself for life. Lisa had borne the pain of having the bones set, and the suffering that had gone before, without a tear, and almost without a word; but when she heard that it would be very long before she could run or walk again, she felt she was really punished, and cried very bitterly. But she kept her tears to herself, and did not let any one see them; and when Percy went up into Mary's room that evening, to ask how she was, she had resumed her old defiant manner, and gave very short answers to his inquiries.

'Her foot did not pain her nearly so much now—it was much better; but her head ached, and she was tired,' and she evidently meant this as a hint that his presence was not desired. He said no more, and left the room almost immediately, and she did not see him again until the following afternoon, when he happened to come in while Mary was sitting with her. She was vexed at the interruption, and still more so when, instead of going again, as he ought to have done, he chose to stay and look for something that he wanted. After poking about for some minutes in his blind way, he turned to Mary and asked if she had done anything with some drawings that they had been looking at a few days before.

'I must have left them here, for I can't find them in my portfolio,' he said. 'Have you seen them anywhere?'

Mary shook her head. 'Which do you mean? Not Captain Carleton's?'

'Yes; those two of his and one of my own. I don't care for mine, it's of no consequence, but I wouldn't have his lost for anything. I don't think I have another.'

'Oh, they are not lost,' said Mary, getting up; 'I shall soon find them. My eyes are better than yours, you know.' And she began a search in various places, while Lisa watched her movements in blank consternation. Until that moment she had

quite forgotten what she had done in her fit of passion a few mornings before. Like everything else, it had passed out of her head directly her anger was over, and she had never given it another thought, until her cousin's present inquiry recalled it to her mind. She could not now let the search go on, so she broke out in desperation: 'It's no use looking for them, Mary, you won't find them. They are gone. I tore them up the other day.' Her face grew crimson, and she did not dare look at Percy as she made this announcement.

'Tore them up! My dear Lisa, you surely didn't do such a thing?' exclaimed Mary, in accents of dismay; while Mrs Tennent—who had just come into the room—asked what they were talking about.

'Some drawings of Percy's,' said Mary. 'But, Lisa, you must be mistaken. You never could have torn them up—you must have seen what they were.'

'I know I did. But I was angry; I did it on purpose.'

'Did it on purpose! O Lisa!' And Mary's tone had as much of reproach in it as perhaps it ever could have. But Percy was silent, though if Lisa had seen his face, she would have been even more sorry than she was. He turned away and walked to the window.

If he were silent, however, not so Mrs Tennent, when she understood what had happened. She overwhelmed her niece with reproaches which had the effect of reducing her into a care-for-nothing, impenetrable mood, when she might have been talked at the whole day without having the least impression made upon her, and when all her better feelings were fast vanishing under the influence of harsh words. At this juncture Percy turned back from the window.

'Will you oblige me, Mrs Tennent, by saying no more about it? It can't be helped, and Lisa had no idea, I am sure, of what she was doing. She could not tell that they were of any particular value to me.'

Lisa looked up at this speech. 'I did know what I was doing,' she said, very decidedly; 'I didn't know you cared about them in particular, but I knew what I was doing well enough. I did it to vex you because you had made me angry.'

Mrs Tennent stood aghast at this announcement.

'Really, Lisa, I should like to know what is to be done with you,' she said, when she had in some measure recovered from her astonishment. 'It seems to me that you are totally devoid of



principle. It is bad enough to act with wilful disobedience, but when it comes to malice too, it is carrying things too far'—— She was stopped by Percy.

'If you would be kind enough to say nothing more about it, you would oblige me very much. The loss is mine, and the best way will be to forget it as soon as I can.'

He left the room, and Mrs Tennent went away also without further remark, though her looks said volumes. But Lisa did not see them; she was doing her best to appear totally unconcerned and indifferent. She could hold out no longer, however, when, after a time, she raised her eyes and found Mary watching her pityingly and almost sadly.

'O Mary! you will hate me,' she exclaimed then; 'I am as bad as bad can be, and I shall never be any better. You may as well give me up and have nothing more to do with me. I've been dreadfully wicked, and what's the use of being sorry now, it won't undo it all, though I'm sure I wish it could. You don't believe me, perhaps—but it's true for all that.'

'Yes, I know it is,' said Mary, who understood how it had happened—'I know it is, and I am very sorry for you.' And at these words all Lisa's sorrow broke forth in a torrent of tears and self-reproaches. She would not have cared so much, she said, if it were only her wilfulness about her rides that she had to be sorry for, because she was punished for that in being obliged to lie there so long. 'It is very hard, Mary, to have to do that—look at the sunshine on the lawn now, and on the lime trees in the green walk; and look at Bär there sitting on the gravel path, snapping at the flies as they come about him: I should like to be having a race with him instead of lying here. I have been thinking of it all the morning; but I thought, too, that the only way I could show I was sorry for having been so bad, was by being patient and not feeling cross for what serves me right. It would make up a little for having done what I ought not; but I can't make up for having been so angry and tearing up those things. I am afraid Percy cares for them very much. Somebody had given them to him, I suppose?'

'Yes, a friend of his who died in India two or three years ago.'

'Died! Is he dead?' and Lisa looked shocked. 'Was he a very particular friend though, or only'——

'A common one,' suggested Mary; 'no, I don't think Percy has any friends of that kind, or if he has, he don't call them

friends, they are only acquaintances. But this one was different, they were like brothers, I believe. Not always,' she added, as if recalling something to mind, 'but latterly. Percy was terribly cut up when he died.'

Lisa was silent for a long time. 'He will never forgive me,' she said at last.

Mary smiled. 'You had better ask him ; he is not unforgiving in general.'

'No, but such a thing as this. I wish, Mary, you could tell him how sorry I am, and that I really didn't know he had any particular reason for caring about those drawings. I wouldn't have torn them up if I had known it ;—even though I was so angry with him. I am very sorry ; I am indeed. Won't you tell him so ?'

'Yes, if you like, I will.' And Mary most probably told her brother not only that, but a good deal more which Lisa never guessed. The next time she saw him, he said, rather stiffly—

'I hope you won't think any more about those drawings, Lisa. I should be sorry for you to go on vexing yourself for a thing that can't be helped, and I am quite sure you had not the least idea they were of any consequence to me.'

She looked up with a blush. If he had spoken less gravely, she would have burst out with all the regret she felt, but his cold and formal tone checked her usual eagerness, and she only said, 'I am very sorry ; and more sorry still since Mary told me about them, and why you cared for them. I wish I had never been so angry.'

It was all she could get out, though vexed with herself for saying so little and appearing so indifferent. 'But it's not my fault,' she thought ; 'if he didn't look so grave I could tell him a great deal more. I would let him see how very sorry I really am, but I can't while he looks like that. I wonder whether he expects me to say anything else.'

Whether he did or not, did not appear. He began to talk on some other subject, but she could not feel certain that she was forgiven, and for some days she was very shy and constrained in his presence, and hardly spoke to him, though she saw him often enough—too often, indeed, in her opinion, for when Mary was disengaged, he was very fond of coming to her room, and bringing there his books or mathematical instruments, or whatever else he might be busy with. At first, Lisa thought this a great bore, and wished him miles away, but she began by degrees

to look forward to these visits as something to relieve the tedium of many weary hours, when, tired with lying in one position, and being always occupied with the same round of employments, she was glad of almost any change to give her something fresh to think about.

Her studies went on as usual with Mary, and that part of the day which was taken up with them was got through very well. But her leisure hours often hung heavily on her hands, for she had an unfortunate distaste for needlework ; and although she liked reading well enough, she got tired even of that at times. Percy's visits began, therefore, to be welcome rather than otherwise, even if it were for nothing else than the pleasure of watching him, sometimes from real interest in what he was doing, sometimes to have a little private fun at his expense, 'because he was so very blind and so plain.'

But as she began to know him better, and to lose the prejudice which she had entertained against him, she could not help acknowledging to herself, that he was by no means so disagreeable as she had imagined him to be. She discovered, indeed, that he could be quite the contrary when he pleased, and he certainly was very kind, and took a great deal of trouble to amuse and give her pleasure when he saw she was tired and dull, and pining for fresh air and her old liberty. He brought her wild flowers from the woods, all her favourites in profusion, which she loved far better than any garden ones, and he told her all that was going on at the farm, in which she took great interest, and supplied her with many new books and engravings which he thought she would like to see ; and happening one day to see a drawing of hers that had been left about, he asked if she would not like to have some lessons in the art, and offered to teach her. If one thing could have delighted her more than any other it was this offer. She told eagerly how very fond she was of drawing, and how much she had always wished to learn. She did not know, though, how it was to be managed while she was obliged to lie there ; but he set to work forthwith and manufactured a board which could be fastened on the sofa, and raised or lowered as she pleased ; and furnished with this and proper materials, she took her first lesson in a state of absorbed delight, which made her for the time oblivious of everything else. She never seemed to grow tired, indeed, of this favourite occupation, and made such progress in it as to astonish everybody, while it served to pass away many hours which she would

otherwise have spent in gazing out of the window, vainly wishing that she were able to run and walk again.

'It certainly is very kind of Percy to take so much trouble about me,' she thought. 'I wonder why he does it, for I am sure I don't deserve it. I had no business to tear up those sketches. I wonder whether he remembers anything about them; he can't have forgotten, surely, and yet he has never said a word to me since, and he is as kind as if I had never done or said a rude thing to him in my life. Sometimes I almost think I begin to like him a little; but—Ah, well, he is dreadfully plain, certainly; and, after all, I am not obliged to like him. I may think him kind without caring about him, and I do think that. I never mean to be rude to him again.'

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### INDIAN TALES.

'WOULD you like to go for a drive this afternoon, Lisa?' said Percy, as, one very bright day early in May, he came into Mary's room. 'We can have the carriage for an hour or two, and, if you like, I will drive you over to Copelands.'

'Drive me to Copelands?' And her face flushed with pleasure. 'How delightful! Do you really mean it?'

'Yes. I have been trying to get the carriage for some days, but my father has been so busy he could not spare it. It won't be wanted, though, this afternoon, and he is glad for you to have the drive. Mary is coming with us; and if you like you can try your hand at sketching; this will be a good opportunity to begin.'

Lisa was very happy. The prospect of once more being out of doors after three weeks' confinement to the house was charming; and when she found herself in the carriage on her way to Copelands, she was brimming over with ecstasy. Everything was delightful—the banks had never looked so green before, nor the hedgerows so fresh and beautiful—the pink and white blossoms on the apple and cherry trees were lovely; and so were the early leaves of the chestnuts and silver birches; and the glowing sunlight on distant hill and near meadow was brighter than she had ever known it. Her exclamations of happiness seemed to amuse Percy not a little, for he kept turning to look

at her, and there was something like a smile on his face as he watched the radiant expression of hers.

'It is a great pity you can't see it too,' she said at last, noticing that he was very silent, and that he seemed to be more occupied with contemplating his whip-handle than admiring the view which just then lay before them. 'You must miss a great deal by being so short-sighted.'

He smiled a little and looked up. 'I suppose I do. If there is anything particular, though, to see, I will put on my glasses. I don't use them more than I can help, because they try my eyes, but I can see well enough when I have them on. Is there anything now that I ought to look at?'

'Oh, no; nothing but what you can see every day. But how disagreeable never to be able to see things without making such a preparation for looking at them! It must be very tiresome.'

'Is it? I don't know that I ever think about it; one gets used to everything in time. I don't often remember, now, that I could see as far as you or anybody else once.'

'Could you?' And she looked at him in some astonishment.

'Yes, till I got this sabre cut,' drawing his hand across his forehead. 'That detracted from my appearance in more ways than one; didn't it, Polly?' he added, more lightly than Lisa had ever heard him speak.

'No, I don't think so; people who don't know you may fancy so, perhaps; but I don't,' Mary answered, quickly, but with so much earnestness in her tone that Lisa was struck. She would have liked to ask when and how he got it, but a glance at his face prevented her. He seemed to be occupied with some painful thoughts, and for some minutes she made no further remark. But when he turned off from the high road into a narrow lane, she asked where they were going.

'Only to some cottages down here. There is one which will be a good subject for your first sketch.'

And a very happy half-hour Lisa spent near that picturesque cottage at the corner of the lane, with its overhanging thatched roof, its lattice windows and curious old porch; and very proud she was of her sketch when it was finished, until she happened to see one that Percy himself had done in about a quarter of the time, while standing beside the carriage and directing her attempts; and then she was so much disgusted with her own that she would have torn it up on the spot, if he had not rescued it.

‘No, Lisa ; that would be very absurd. You must remember I have had years of practice, and you are only just beginning. It would be ridiculous to tear it up because you are not quite satisfied.’

‘Not satisfied at all, you mean,’ remarked Lisa. ‘It is simply hideous.’ But she did as she was told ; rather a wonderful thing for her, considering that the person who spoke was not Mary ; and, the sketch-book and pencils being put away, they proceeded to Copelands to pay their visit there.

A very short visit, for it was getting late, and almost time to return ; but while Mrs Pye came out to the carriage to speak to Lisa, Percy walked off somewhere, and was presently seen returning, bringing a handsome Skye terrier with him.

‘Oh, what a beauty ! Mrs Pye, where did you get him ?’ Lisa exclaimed. ‘What a dear shaggy little creature ! Oh, do let me look at him. I’m so fond of dogs. When did you buy him ?’

‘Bless you, my dear, he’s none of mine,’ returned Mrs Pye. ‘I don’t care for dogs, and don’t want any in the house. No ; the farmer got him yesterday for Captain Tennent—bought him of a lady at Burnside. The Captain said he’d come to-day and fetch him, so you’re going to take him back with you, I suppose ?’

‘I hope so, I’m sure,’ said Lisa, growing excited. ‘Oh, put him in here, please,’ as Percy came up to the carriage. ‘Mrs Pye says he is yours ; and may I hold his chain ? You can’t do that and drive too. I’ll take great care of him. Mary, did you ever see such a dear, intelligent-looking creature ? And his eyes’—— Speech was lost in admiration.

‘Are beautiful—when you see them !’ said Mary, with a laugh.

‘But that’s just as it ought to be,’ Lisa exclaimed. ‘Evidently you don’t understand this kind of dog. Look at them now when I push back his hair. How bright and knowing they are ! Do you see his mouth, too ? Quite black ; look at the roof. Oh, he is a beauty !’

‘I am glad you like him,’ Percy said, as they drove off. ‘He will be a companion for you while you are shut up ; and I don’t think you will have any trouble in making friends with him. He seems very sociably inclined.’

‘Yes, I think so. He is fond of me already. But do you really mean I may have him up-stairs with me while I can’t walk about ?’

'You may have him as often as you like, and for as long as you like. To say the truth, Lisa, that was why I got him. I thought he would be an amusement to you. You can keep him till you are tired of him, and when you want to get rid of him, you must give him back to me.'

'And suppose I never want to get rid of him?' Lisa said, looking at him for a moment with a curious expression, half of wistfulness, half of fun, and then laying her head on the dog's rough neck, 'Suppose I never want to get rid of him?'

'Then you had better keep him altogether; he will not object to having you for his mistress, I dare say. And if you think you won't care to part with him, you may as well consider him yours at once.'

Lisa raised her head again. 'Mine? Really? But—oh, no, you can't be in earnest; you would never give him away?' And she looked at him very doubtfully.

'Why not? I did not get him for myself, and if you don't like to have him, I must find some one else to take him. But you have so few pleasures just now that I hoped he would help to amuse you a little.'

Lisa's astonishment was very great. 'And you got him for me? Really on purpose for me?' And then, as she read the answer in his smile, 'How very kind of you! How very, very kind! But—I can hardly believe it—I have never had a live pet of my own in my life except my poor goldfinch years ago. And a dog! I have always wished for one so much. How good of you to think of such a thing!' she exclaimed, in childish delight; adding, however, a moment afterwards, with a change of tone and a deepening colour, 'I don't know, though, whether I ought to have him. You forget it's my own fault that I can't run about. If I had done as I was told, I needn't have been shut up.'

'No, I know that; it was not very wise of you, Lisa.'

'Not very wise, and not very right, either,' she said, earnestly. 'I have been very sorry for it since: sorry for that, and for a good many other things too.' And once more she laid her head down among the dog's shaggy hair. 'I wonder what his name is?' she said, after a pause, resuming her usual manner. 'I hope it's a pretty one.'

But on this subject Percy could not enlighten her, for he had forgotten to ask. He believed, however, some one had told him it was Prince, and as the dog, when appealed to by Lisa, wagged

his tail, and looked knowing, the name, whether originally his or not, was set down to him at once. 'And a very good name it is for him too,' she remarked. 'I shall take such care of him, and I am so glad to have him! I only hope Aunt Helen will let me keep him; she has always taken everything away from me before. Whenever I got angry, she—ah, well, I won't talk about it now, for you don't like to hear me say such things, I know, Mary.' And Lisa smothered her rising resentment in hugs and caresses of her new treasure.

She was on her sofa that evening, with the dog beside her, thinking of all the pleasures she had had that day, when a person who had called about some needlework was shown into the room where she was lying. Mrs Daly was an old acquaintance, and Lisa had many questions to ask her about herself and her family, and grew very much interested in hearing various particulars concerning them. She was struck, however, after a time, by a change in the woman's manner, and, on looking up to discover the cause of a short answer she had received, she saw that Mrs Daly's eyes were fixed upon the likeness of Percy which hung over the piano. It had arrested her attention so completely, that for some moments she evidently forgot everything else. Her earnest gaze surprised Lisa not a little, and she wondered what had brought that strange look to her face, and the tears to her eyes; for that there were tears she saw plainly, though they were brushed away when Mrs Daly became aware that she was observed.

'You know that, then?' Lisa said, after a pause. 'You have seen my cousin, I suppose?'

'Yes.' The woman's face brightened. 'It's very like him,' she added, turning to the picture again. 'Like what he used to be, I mean.'

'Why, did you know him, then?' Lisa asked. 'It's a long time since that was taken.'

'Yes; but I knew him in India, Miss Lisa. He looks much older now. But that's what he was then; what he was when he saved my child—my little Ted. God bless him for it!' There were tears in her eyes again. 'May I look at it, Miss Lisa, a little nearer, if you please?' And she walked across the room, and stood gazing at it with the most intense interest. It's so like him—just as he used to look!' she murmured to herself.

'When was it?' Lisa asked, her curiosity excited. 'When did he save your child? Ted, you said?—that nice big boy of



yours. How was it? Tell me,' in her slightly imperious way. 'I like to hear those kind of things. You can look at that and tell me, too, you know.'

Mrs Daly smiled a little, but she was nothing loath to tell her tale, though she wondered Miss Lisa had not heard it before; Miss Mary knew it, and she thought every one else did—with which preface she began a story of her past days. She had been the wife of a sergeant, and had followed him to India, where she had gone through great hardships. The incident to which she alluded had occurred in the second Sikh war, when, in the hurry and confusion consequent upon the evacuation of some fort, her child, then not much more than a year old, had been overlooked and left behind. She was ill at the time, and unable to see to her baby, which had been given in charge to another person, and her horror upon arriving at the place of safety, to which she, with the other women and the children, had been conveyed, and finding that her child had been forgotten, was too great to be described. The English army was in retreat, and she knew that the fort which had just been evacuated was to be blown up to prevent its falling into the enemy's hands. A party of engineers had stayed behind for that purpose, and that her child would perish in the explosion she never doubted. She could not tell calmly, even now, of the fears and agonies of those long hours; how, unable to rest where they had laid her, she wandered up and down, not asking for her baby, for she never hoped to see it again, but scanning every face to find one that had come from the place where it had been left, that she might hear something, even if it were only to know that all was over. She told, too, how all day long she had listened to the firing in the distance, until, when evening closed, it ceased at length; and parties came trooping in, and amongst them some engineers.

'I watched them come in, and I saw them standing round a watch-fire, Miss Lisa; and for a long time I stood and looked at them, stupid-like, for I seemed as if I could neither speak nor move. But after a bit, I saw there was one of them, an officer, who had something in his arms; he was covered with blood and black with powder, and his face looked ghastly in the fire-light; but I heard them say it was him that had had the blowing-up of the fort; and I can't tell why it was, but something like hope seemed to come back to me, and I went up to him. Ah, Miss Lisa, I don't know how it all happened now; I don't know

how I got my baby ; but it was him he had—my little Ted—not hurt, not a scratch about him, and fast asleep in his arms, as if he had been in mine. I just went down on my knees to thank him, but I couldn't. I looked at him, but I couldn't say one word, and he didn't wait to hear me—he gave him back to me, and then he was off before I could speak. But they told me all afterwards ; how when the train was laid, and he—Lieutenant Tennent, that's what he was then—when he had lighted the match with his own hand, and had stayed behind after he sent the others off, to make sure it was burning, he heard a child cry, and at the risk of his own life ran back and found my Ted, and brought him off. He was only just in time—he was thrown down by the explosion and stunned for some minutes, but he had got my child, and he kept him fast—and he carried him through all that hard fighting that day, and gave him back to me at night, when I thought I had lost him for ever. I shall never forget it, Miss Lisa. I would go through fire and water for him, I would ; and my husband would have done the same.' Mrs Daly's voice was very husky as she spoke.

'It was very brave of him,' said Lisa, her eye kindling and her colour deepening while she listened.

'Brave—yes—there wasn't a braver in all the army than he was ; and he was good, too, Miss Lisa, and kind. Everybody said the same of him ; he was always the one to do a kindness, or help anybody who wanted it. He was kind to me—the best friend I ever had. He took a great fancy to Ted after that day—he was always fond of children, you know, miss—and he never met me afterwards without coming to ask after him. I used to see him often ; and when my husband died out there, and I was in such distress, wasn't he kind to me ? He paid my passage home ; and as I'd hardly a friend in England, and none to go to, he told me to come down here, and wrote to Miss Mary about me. I'm getting on well now, and my boys are growing up nicely ; they'll be big fellows soon, and they're a comfort to me—Ted in particular ; and I don't forget that if it hadn't been for the Captain, I shouldn't have had him now.'

Here Mary's entrance put a stop to Mrs Daly's communications ; and Lisa, though she would have liked to ask a hundred other questions, was obliged to restrain her curiosity. No sooner, however, did she find herself alone with her cousin than she began, eagerly :—

'Mary, I should like very much to ask you something.'

There was a smile from Mary at the abrupt way in which this was said.

'It's about Percy,' she went on. 'I've been hearing of him from Mrs Daly just now—about Ted, you know. Mary, it was very brave of him, wasn't it? And I do like to hear of brave things.' Her eyes were sparkling again. 'I always did; and I had never heard of this before.'

'Hadn't you? Well, you have had a full account of it now, I am quite sure,' was the answer.

'Not a bit more than I liked. I should like to have heard a great deal more, indeed, only you came in and prevented me. But, Mary, what I was wanting to ask you was about that terrible cut he has on his forehead. Do you mind telling me how he got it? In fighting, was it?'

'Yes, dear; in the same war, but later, at the siege of Mooltan.'

'Well?' Lisa was looking at her impatiently, finding she did not go on. 'Why don't you tell me, Mary? You don't mind my knowing about it, do you? I fancied, do you know, from what you said this afternoon, that'——

'That he has reason to be proud of it, and so he has. He was defending a brother-officer who had been badly wounded, from a party of Sikhs, when he was cut down himself. Fortunately some of his own soldiers came up at the time, or they would both have been killed. Percy was supposed to be dead when they carried him off, and for weeks afterwards no one thought he would recover.'

Lisa was silent. She fancied from her cousin's manner that she had not heard all yet; and she was right, for after a pause Mary said, with some hesitation——

'It was Captain Carleton whom he saved, and'——

'Captain Carleton, that friend of his that you told me about the other day?'

'Yes, dear; but they were not friends then—quite the contrary. Captain Carleton had done him a great wrong, and for months before that day at Mooltan they had never spoken to each other except when absolutely obliged. There were faults on both sides, I believe; at least Percy has said since, things need not have gone so far [if he had not been too proud to explain circumstances in which he was misjudged. But the chief fault lay with Captain Carleton—he owned it himself afterwards. He was angry, and listened to misrepresentations; and he did Percy great injury in more ways than one. He was

his senior by three or four years, and captain of his company ; so that it was in his power to annoy him exceedingly at times, and he did. We never knew at the time how much Percy suffered through him, and I don't suppose we ever should have known it if it had not been for Captain Carleton himself. He got well long before Percy did, and he was very grateful. He did everything he could for him while he was ill, and used to write to us constantly, and in one of his letters he told us all that had happened. Such a noble letter it was, and he spoke of Percy—well, never mind what he said, but I know that I was proud of my brother. I had a right to be, for it was not every one, no, nor one in a thousand, who would have done what he did.' Mary's eyes were glistening as she spoke.

'And that was what made them friends?' said Lisa thoughtfully, after a long pause.

'Yes, they were fast friends after that ; and when he died two or three years ago, Percy felt his death as much as if he had been his brother. It was a fever of some sort that he had, and hardly any one would go near him because it was supposed to be infectious ; but Percy nursed him day and night through it all, and was with him when he died. He was dreadfully cut up, and I don't think he has got over it even now, for he never seems to like to hear his name mentioned. But that is just like him, though nobody believes it of him in general. He is cold and reserved in manner, and very few people know how warm-hearted he really is.' And Mary, who, like many another sister, could grow eloquent in talking of her brother, went on to tell of many instances of his unselfishness, and care for those whose weakness or danger had claimed his assistance.

Lisa listened to it all, but she said very little in answer. She was unusually silent, not only then, but all that evening ; and when Mary was called away, she lay in the dusk, looking up into the lime-trees above her window, too much engrossed with her own thoughts to care to turn to any other occupation. What these thoughts were she would have found it hard to tell, and she made no attempt to analyse them. There was only one thing of which she was conscious, and that was a feeling of self-reproach for the injustice she had done her cousin. She was ashamed to think how often she had ridiculed him for his plain looks and short-sightedness ; how often, too, she had laughed at him for the very thing for which she ought most to have honoured him. For that scar which she considered such a dis-

figurement, and which had provoked her thoughtless wit into bestowing on him a nickname, had been gained in saving the life of one who had wronged him, and was, in truth, the noblest decoration he could have worn. 'I wish I had never been so foolish, so wicked,' she said to herself. 'If I had only known all this before, I never would have laughed at him. I wonder whether he ever heard me! Oh, I hope not! But I don't think he did: he wouldn't have been so kind to me surely if he had. I like him now, though he is so plain. I am not sure, indeed, that he is so very plain. He didn't look so this afternoon. When he smiled he was rather like Mary, and if he were not so grave, I fancy he would be good-looking. I don't know why he shouldn't be, for he hasn't such bad features; I've seen people with much worse. It's only because he has such black hair and is so dark, and looks so old, and has—and is—— Oh dear, how silly I am! What does it matter what his looks are, if I like him, which I do most certainly? And very odd it is, for I never meant to do so.'

Her cogitations were brought to an end by the entrance of a servant with lights; but when she went to bed that night, her thoughts returned to her cousin Percy, and in her dreams she saw him on the battle-field, with a little child in his arms, fighting his way through drawn swords and the flash of musketry; and then, trembling with fear, she seemed to stand by his side, while he kept at bay the fierce-looking soldiers who were crowding round them, and who pressed hard on some prostrate figure, whose half-hidden face was strangely like Arthur's. With which medley of thoughts her sleep became a sound one and dreams terminated.

It was with different feelings, however, from those with which she had hitherto regarded him that she met her cousin the next day; so different were they, that she almost expected to see some change in him, and was disappointed to find him looking as he always did, with nothing about him of the hero into which her imagination had exalted him. No; he was only her plain and silent cousin Percy; just as plain and silent as she had always known him, and evidently far enough from suspecting the deep interest, almost reverence, with which she now looked upon him. But in spite of the momentary disappointment she experienced at this, she could never again in thought or word depreciate him as she had once done. Grave and reserved he might be still, and with no good looks to please those who cared only

for personal advantages ; but never could she think slightly of him who had perilled his life for one who had wronged him, and who had braved danger and death itself to carry a little child back to its mother. In her eyes from that day he was a hero—and a hero all the more from his unconsciousness of having done anything to arouse her feelings of interest and admiration.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## ISABEL'S RETURN.

'ISABEL comes back this day fortnight,' remarked Elinor one afternoon a week or two later. 'I am very glad, for I shall get off some of these disagreeable calls when she is at home. I dislike them so much, and it's so hot to-day !'

'So it is.' And Lisa raised her head from the drawing over which she was bending, and pushed back her hair from her face. 'Is Isabel really coming back so soon ?' she asked, after a pause.

'Yes ; why not ? I am sure she has been away long enough. She is quite well now, she says, and Janet is tired of Italy ; so they mean to leave the Parkers to finish their tour alone, and get back as soon as they can. Mr Thorpe—Cunninghame Thorpe, you know—goes to fetch them.'

'Mr Thorpe ! I don't know anything about him,' was Lisa's answer, in rather an absent tone.

'Don't know anything about him ! Oh, no, I forgot. Well, you will see him the week after next, for he is coming down with Janet and Isabel, and I daresay he will stay here before he goes on to his uncle at the Moat.'

'His uncle ?'

'Yes, his uncle. My dear Lisa, how can you be so stupid ! You can't pretend not to know that old Sir Richard Thorpe is Janet's uncle ; and of course he must be her brother's too. What are you thinking of to be so silly ?'

'I don't know. I am sure I had forgotten that Janet had anything to do with the Moat.'

'Very likely ; I don't believe you ever remember things, Lisa, like other people. But you ought to have known that, because Janet went there several times when she was here last, and she was always talking of her grumpy old uncle. Oh dear, here's a button off my glove ! I wonder where Mary is, to sew it on

again. Old Sir Richard is very rich, and Cunninghame Thorpe will have that place when he dies, and the baronetcy too. His father was Sir Richard's younger brother, you know.'

'No, I didn't know it.' Cunninghame Thorpe was nothing to Lisa.

'He is not at all like Janet,' Elinor went on, with a long yawn. 'He is very handsome—has the most splendid blue eyes you ever saw, and such a moustache! He will be an acquisition here, I expect, for he can make himself very agreeable, though Isabel does say she can't bear him, and Arthur—— Oh, that reminds me that Arthur is not coming. He's going to Gainsford instead.'

'Going to Gainsford! How tiresome! That's Ralph's doing, of course. How provoking of him!'

'Very. But he won't stay long; only till Ralph can get away himself; and then they both come here. Ah, there's mamma calling me. And here's Percy coming to look after your drawing. I wish I were you, Lisa, to stay at home and lie on the sofa.' And Elinor sauntered off, wondering how the button was to get on her glove before she went out.

'I am not so fond of lying here,' Lisa remarked as the door closed. 'And, O Captain Tennent, do come and look at this thing, and tell me where it's wrong. It is horrid, and I can't get it right.'

She threw down her pencil a little pettishly, but her face brightened again as he sat down beside her and began to make the necessary corrections. 'I was hot and cross,' she said then apologetically; 'but it's not so bad after all, I see. I want to draw well,' she added, after a pause; 'I think if I can do that, and play well too, I shall get more money.'

'Get more money?'

'Yes; when I have to teach, I mean. I am to be a governess some day, you know.'

'No, I did not know it.'

'Yes. This isn't my home; I have none of my own, and I can't live here always.'

'Why not? What is there to prevent it?' he said hastily.

'I don't know; but—what have I said? Have I vexed you?'

'Vexed me?' and he smiled. 'No; what could make you fancy such a thing? But what reason did you give for not being able to stay here? You have no home of your own, and have

a right to look to us, as your nearest relations, to give you one.'

'I don't know. Aunt Helen don't think so at any rate.' She hesitated. 'I can't help myself now; but I would rather not stay by-and-by.'

'You would not? And why not, may I ask?' And then, as he caught sight of her crimson face, 'My dear Lisa, you can't suppose that anybody here grudges you house-room.'

'My dear Lisa.' The tears were in her eyes at the words, and the tone in which they were said, but she made an attempt to laugh. 'No, I suppose not; I'm not very big, and I don't take up much room anywhere. But, oh, you must have seen it, Aunt Helen don't care for me—she never has—she has always said I must go; and I would rather. I don't wish to stay where I know I am not wanted.'

Percy was silent for some minutes, and when he spoke again his voice was changed. 'And you don't mind the idea of a governess's life?' he said then.

'Mind it? No; why should I? I think I shall like it. I shall like working and earning my own money, and being'——

'Independent.'

'Yes, and being independent. It isn't wrong to like that, is it? The only thing is that I don't know exactly what governesses do, and I am afraid I should make such lots of mistakes. But I suppose I should learn in time, and I should only begin with quite little children at first. It would be great fun, I think, and I am so fond of children; I have some dear little things at the Sunday-school, you know; they don't do much but tumble off the forms, and then I pick them up again; but still I teach them a little, so I suppose I could teach others too.'

'And so you will not mind leaving the Priory?' Percy said after some moments' silence; 'you will be glad to get away?'

'Glad! What, to leave Mary and uncle Henry, who have been so kind to me! If you knew what I feel when I think of leaving them, you wouldn't say I was glad.' There was something of reproach in her tone. 'It will make me miserable; but what can I do? I would rather work than stay here, even to be with Mary; but I wish—oh, I wish I had a home of my own; a home where I had a right to be. Sometimes at night I fancy that I have; I dream that I am back there again, and I can see



it all quite plain, though it's years ago since I was there. I don't know what I do exactly, but I am very happy; and then I wake and it's all gone. I don't like to think of it, and sometimes I feel very lonely and miserable; only then I try to think of the bright side—of the little children, and of earning my own money. How much do you think I shall get? But you don't know anything about governesses, do you?

Percy did know quite enough about them to make him hope most fervently that it might never be his cousin's lot to learn anything of their life from personal experience; but he did not say so, and only answered, rather shortly, 'that he had not seen much of them.' He was in one of what Lisa called 'his dreadfully grave moods,' about which she had lately begun to rally him. He changed the subject.

'You are going out this evening,' he said. 'I have asked for the carriage, and we are going to Delse Common, you know.'

'Yes, for one of my last drives. How pleasant they have been! I shall be sorry to give them up, though I like walking so much better. And to-morrow I am to begin to use my foot again. I am going to borrow your stick and hop about the garden, and in a week or two I daresay I shall be able to walk as well as anybody. But you will let me go on with my reading and drawing, won't you? I shouldn't like to lose all my pleasures at once.'

Isabel came, and with her arrived Janet Darrell, the wife of Arthur's elder brother, and Mr Cunninghame Thorpe. Lisa, who was taking a French lesson at the time, and who heard the murmur of voices below, had her attention wofully distracted by these sounds, and fell into dire disgrace with Madame Ricard in consequence. When Isabel, having dressed for dinner, came into the room, Madame was discovered in a highly excited state, and her pupil, with a saucily defiant air, was coolly drawing a caricature of her wrathful instructress. Happily for both parties, the entrance of Isabel caused a diversion. In former days she had been one of the favourite pupils of Madame, who was so delighted to see her again that she forgot her anger, and Lisa sat by in great contentment, inwardly thanking her cousin for the pleasant interruption she had made.

Isabel was Mrs Tennent's eldest daughter, and five or six years older than her sister Elinor, whom she resembled strongly

in face and figure, although she was far more womanly and self-possessed in manner. Like her, too, she was ordinarily very quiet; but it was not with her as with Elinor, the quiet of indolence, but of thought and reflection. No one could look at Isabel, at her intellectual face and expressive eye, without seeing that she was talented in no ordinary degree; and she was not only clever naturally, but had read much, and studied for the love of study; her knowledge of languages, music, and painting was wonderful. As the eldest, and for some time the only child of the second family, she had been a great pet with her half-brother and sister, who were proud of her cleverness; with Percy more especially was she a favourite; and as she grew older, he had had no greater pleasure than that of encouraging her talents in every possible way. Although he had left home while she was still a child, his influence had not gone with him; he had never forgotten the sister of whom he had been so proud; nor had she on her side forgotten the brother whose interest in all she did and cared for had made her occupations and pleasures doubly pleasant. They had corresponded constantly, and when after long years of absence he had returned to England, shortly before the breaking out of the Russian war, his visit had been to her a time of absorbing, though of undemonstrative delight. Undemonstrative, indeed, she always was, and not less so now than ever.

Lisa saw her afterwards in the green walk with Percy, deep in conversation, but pacing by his side soberly and quietly; and when she met her later in the drawing-room, she was seated by her mother, discussing home news in a very matter-of-fact way. Lisa's attention, however, was diverted from her then, for there were others in the room who possessed greater interest for her at that moment. Janet Darrell was there, and at a window near stood her brother Cunninghame Thorpe talking to Elinor, who, in the description she had once given of him, had by no means overrated his personal attractions.

He was very handsome; handsomer, Lisa thought, than any one she had ever seen; and the marked contrast between him and her cousin Percy was very striking. The latter, perhaps, had never appeared so plain to her as he did at that moment; she had forgotten, indeed, how very plain he was; and it was disagreeable to be reminded of it now. His dark, thoughtful face looked almost gloomy beside that of his gay, animated companion, who was evidently on the best of terms with himself

and perfectly aware of his own fascinations. But Lisa was too simple to detect, in such a brief survey, the symptoms of self-consciousness which betrayed themselves in his 'get-up' and attitude; and her hasty glance at him was one of great admiration—admiration which he seemed to return with interest, when, as she was crossing the room to speak to her sister, he for the first time caught sight of her.

'By Jove, what a pretty girl! Who is she, and where on earth did she spring from?' was his eager exclamation; and the tone in which it was uttered made Percy look as if he would have had no objection to knock him down. He vouchsafed no reply to the question. It was answered, however, by Janet.

'Little Lisa Kennedy, I declare! Why, Lisa, who would have thought it!' holding out her hand as she spoke. 'How you have grown! I should hardly have known you again, only your face is not much altered. When do you mean to look less like a child, I wonder? You are growing up now, and ought to be more womanly.'

'Lisa has no wish to do that,' remarked Isabel. 'Unless she is very much altered, you could not, in her opinion, pay her a greater compliment than to tell her she has nothing of the woman about her.'

Lisa was silent; but something in the tone annoyed her, and the colour mounted to her face.

She was glad that Mr Thorpe, coming up, asked to be introduced to her; and as he remained by her side for some time, she forgot her annoyance, and found him so agreeable, that she was sorry when her aunt broke off the conversation by sending her away on some errand. She confided to Mary afterwards the favourable impression he had made upon her.

'He's so very pleasant,' she said, 'and so amusing! And he was telling me such a very entertaining story, when Aunt Helen sent me away! It was very provoking of her, for I wanted to hear the end of it. I like hearing him talk, he has so much to say. And how handsome he is, isn't he?'

'Very,' said Mary, smiling a little. 'Very handsome, indeed. And yet, Lisa, I am not sure that I quite like his face. I have seen others that I like better.'

'Have you?' Lisa said, rather absently. She was thinking of the difference between Mr Thorpe and her cousin Percy, and the thought appeared to change the current of her ideas, for,

after a pause, she said, 'Percy is very fond of Isabel, Mary. He seems to care for her almost more than he does for you. It is very strange.'

'Is it? No, I don't think so. She is so clever, and can enter into so many things that I know nothing about. And he helped so much to make her what she is, that it is only natural he should be proud of her.'

'But, Mary, you are his own sister, and she is not. It don't seem right that he should care for her more than he does for you. I don't like it.'

She spoke in her hasty way, and Mary laughed.

'I think you are mistaken. He cares for me as much as he does for Isabel, only it is in a different way. Surely, Lisa dear, you are not going to try and make me jealous?' she added. 'That would be very absurd. And I had just been thinking how pleasant it is for him to have her at home. They are so happy when they are together; they have so many things in common, and can talk of all sorts of things that I don't understand. I am not clever, you know; I never was.'

Lisa was silent for a minute, and then she jumped up.

'I don't know whether you are clever or not,' she said, throwing her arms round her neck, and bestowing on her a most impetuous embrace. 'But I'm quite sure of one thing, and that is, that if all people that are not clever are like you, I like them a great deal better than those who are—that's all.'

And away she went.

'Where are you going, Percy?' she said, as she happened to meet him on the stairs one morning a few days afterwards—days during which she had seen but little of him, his time having been claimed almost incessantly by Isabel. 'Where are you going? And what are those things you have in your hand? Drawings?'

'No, illuminations.' And he spread them out on the wide seat of the window on the landing where they had met. 'They are some of Isabel's—of her own designing, and very good too. I was wishing you to see them.' And he showed a succession of beautifully-illuminated wreaths and crosses, leaves, flowers, and berries, while Lisa looked on in a state of bewildered admiration.

'Do you really mean to say she did all those herself? How exquisite they are! I don't think I ever saw any, even for sale, so beautiful. It must be very difficult, isn't it?'

‘Not the mechanical part ; but of course for designing there must be both taste and talent. And Isabel has both. These are not her best, though, by any means. She has some which are much more elaborate ; you must come and see them. I don’t believe you have seen any of her last paintings either.’

‘I have scarcely seen any of her paintings,’ Lisa said, a little dolefully, ‘except those that are in the drawing-room. She never lets me go into her room. I’m very sorry, for I’ve often wanted to look at her things.’

‘Then you must come now,’ Percy said, smiling : ‘I am going there myself, and you must come with me. She will like it.’

‘I don’t think she will,’ Lisa said, hanging back, doubtfully ; but he drew her on, and at the top of the stairs, hardly waiting for the ceremony of knocking, he opened the door of his sister’s room.

It was a curious place that room of Isabel’s, and had been fitted up as a sort of studio by Mrs Tennent, who was very proud of her daughter’s talents. An easel stood near the window, and the walls were hung with drawings and paintings in all stages of progression ; while other things lying about showed that her taste lay in many different directions. Cabinets filled with curiosities of natural history and geological specimens which she had collected and arranged, antique ornaments and statuettes, casts in plaster of paris, and models for sculpture, a harp and a guitar, were some of the most conspicuous objects ; and the tables and chairs, and even the floor, were piled with books and manuscripts which she had pulled down from their shelves as she wanted them for reference. Lisa stood at the entrance and looked with astonishment at the curious aspect of this ‘private den,’ into which she had never yet found admittance. Nor was she to find it now.

‘Here, Isabel, I’m bringing you a visitor,’ Percy said. ‘Lisa tells me she has never been here before, and she has a great desire to see your paintings. May we come in ?’

Isabel was standing at her easel with her eyes fixed on a copy of an ‘Ecce Homo,’ by Guercino, which lay before her, and as she did not turn when her brother spoke, she was not aware that Lisa herself was already at the door.

‘Nonsense, Percy, don’t bring that child here,’ she exclaimed hastily. ‘She knows nothing about these things. Pray don’t let her come and interfere with us.’

Percy’s face changed ; there was a shade upon it for a

moment, but it disappeared, and he turned to Lisa with a smile.

'Never mind ; she is so deep in her studies that she does not know what she is saying. You must not wait for an invitation, you see ; you must come in without one. She'll soon find how nearly your tastes and hers are alike.'

But Lisa drew back, her face crimson, her eyes flashing.

'No, thank you, I never go where I'm not wanted.'

She pulled her hand from his, and turning, flew down-stairs ; he could not stop her ; she was out of sight in a moment. She rushed off to the far end of the garden, and there, crouching down between some raspberry bushes, she lay hidden in a very disconsolate fit ; and although she saw her cousin walking about in search of her, and knew he was wanting her to come out, she was too angry and miserable to show herself, and for a long time had a hard fight to keep back the tears which would rise to her eyes.

'I knew how it would be,' she said to herself ; 'she *won't* like me ; she thinks me good for nothing, and won't believe I want to be better. And she will make him think so too, and then he won't care for me any more. I don't believe he does now, indeed ; I don't think he cares for me half as much as he did two or three days ago.' But although she said this to herself, Lisa could not help smiling a little, for in her heart of hearts she did not believe her own assertion. 'Well, I won't care anything about him then. He and Isabel may do as they like, and I won't trouble myself about them. They shan't think I'm making myself miserable.'

And with this determination she dried her eyes ; and growing tired of doing nothing, and of having only the raspberry bushes for companions, left her hiding-place, and betook herself to some employment. She did not see Percy again until the afternoon, when, as she was sitting on the floor by the window in Mary's room reading, he opened the door.

'Lisa, I want to speak to you for a minute.'

'Can't come,' she said, without looking up from her book.

'Not for one minute ? I won't keep you, and I'm going out directly. I shall not be back again this evening.'

'You must wait till to-morrow, then. I'm busy now.'

'Why, my dear Lisa, you are not doing anything in particular,' said Mary ; 'you can spare a minute or two, surely !'

'No, Mary dear, I can't, it's quite impossible !' jumping up as

she spoke, and walking off to the piano ; 'I have my music to practise before tea. I know what Percy's minutes are when he begins to talk.' She closed the argument by dashing into a very noisy polka, and Percy was obliged to leave the room.

But he did not find the opportunity he wanted for speaking to her even on the following day. She kept out of his reach, and would have nothing to do with him, stopping her ears when he began to say anything, and dancing off to shut herself up in her own room when she found no other way of silencing him. Nor would she go on with any of the occupations which lately had given her so much pleasure. Singing, which she had begun to practise diligently under Mary's superintendence on purpose to please him, was now neglected : it made her throat ache, she said. The books, too, which he had lent her to read, were thrown aside, and her drawings were thrust into a corner with a quantity of waste paper and other rubbish.

'Where is that last one you were doing, Lisa?' he asked one day. 'You must have finished it by this time. Will you let me look at it?'

'No ; it's not done,' she said carelessly ; 'and I don't intend to finish it. I'm tired of drawing now ; it's stupid work. I mean to give it up. Now that I can run about again, I like that better than sitting still. We are all going over to Cope-lands this afternoon to make hay, and Mr Thorpe is coming with us. That will be much greater fun.'

Percy was silent, but she saw that she had vexed him, and went away with a smile upon her face. It was so amusing to think that she—such a little thing as she was—could vex a great tall man like him ; and so silly, too, of him to be vexed at anything she could do, that she felt quite proud. Never had she been so capricious, perverse and tormenting as she was during the few days that followed ; and Percy, who had begun to be aware how much his happiness was bound up in her, felt the change bitterly. She had no idea how seriously he was annoyed by her wilfulness and caprice, or she would have considered twice, perhaps, before giving so much pain to one whom she really liked. It was mere thoughtlessness on her part ; she liked the amusement of the thing ; she liked to see him look grave and vexed, and to think she had the power of making him so. And it was a gratification which she had very often at that time.

## CHAPTER X.

## PENITENCE.

BUT Lisa's wayward fit, after lasting a few days, was brought to an end by a little incident that took place one evening in Mr Pye's meadows. She had been spending the afternoon there, and had been amusing herself in the erection of an enormous hay-cock, when she suddenly discovered that she had lost a very pretty little silk handkerchief which Mary had given her. It had been only loosely tied round her neck, and of course had slipped off when she was too busy to notice her loss.

'Oh, my handkerchief! Where is it gone? Do help me to find it, Mr Thorpe,' to that gentleman, who happened to come up just then with Percy. 'I wouldn't lose it for anything.'

Mr Thorpe obeyed with all alacrity, beginning by demolishing the hay-cock, in which it was most likely to be secreted, and Percy assisted in the search, while she stood by lamenting, or rather pretending to do so, for after a minute or two she seemed to forget that she cared about it, and was quite taken up with watching her cousin, whose blind way of carrying on the hunt amused her exceedingly. She had often laughed at him for 'that odd habit he had of screwing up his eyes, as if he thought he could see better when they were shut,' though she had never gone so far as to let him overhear her remarks. But she was now in one of her most reckless moods, which made her not only forget common politeness, but a good deal more; and after observing him for some minutes with great amusement, she next twisted up a hay-stalk in the shape of an eye-glass, and walked about after him, picking up little things which she frowned over and subjected to a minute inspection, greatly to the amusement of Mr Thorpe. For some time Percy was not aware of what she was doing, but his suspicions were awakened at last in consequence of one or two smothered bursts of laughter from Susan and Constance, and, happening once to turn rather suddenly, he caught Lisa with the pretended glass to her eye, in the act of exchanging a glance of ill-suppressed merriment with Mr Thorpe. It was not what he had expected. That he was not improved by his near-sightedness he knew well enough, and if she alone had chosen to laugh at him on that account, he would have thought nothing of it; but that she should amuse herself at his expense with a



comparative stranger was what he had not looked for, and Lisa no sooner met his eye than she saw she had gone too far ; she saw she had wounded him deeply, and all her wilful recklessness vanished in a moment. She was miserable ; she would have given anything to tell him she was sorry—that she had been thoughtless and rude, but would never be so again. But Mr Thorpe was standing there, and she could not speak. She turned away, hot, blinding tears in her eyes, only caring that no one should notice her, or know how wretched she was.<sup>1</sup>

The handkerchief was found. After a long search, Percy discovered it in some hay at a little distance, and brought it to her when she was beginning to fear she had quite lost it. She took it in silence ; she could not thank him, and, tying it round her neck again, walked back to the farm feeling more miserable than ever. Mr Thorpe chose to keep her company, and she saw no more of her cousin till late that evening, when, as she was passing through the hall, on her way up-stairs, she heard the house-door open, and looking round saw him just coming in. She had thought that she must wait till morning to make her confession—to ask him to forgive her ; but now here was the opportunity she was longing for, she could speak to him at once if she liked ; and after a moment's hesitation, looking very shy and very miserable, she walked up to him.

‘Percy,’—he was stooping down, but started as she spoke, and looked up,—‘Percy, I was very rude to you this evening ; but won’t you forgive me ? You don’t know how sorry I am.’ Her lip quivered, and her eyes were full of tears as she spoke.

Percy’s face brightened strangely. He must have been very different from what he was if he could have resisted such an appeal. He forgot his annoyance completely, and only thought her the prettiest and most lovable little creature he had ever seen.

‘Never mind, Lisa,’ he said with a smile ; ‘it was foolish of me to care about it. I might have known better than to take such a thing amiss from you. And I believe I am awkward at times ; you had a legitimate excuse for your amusement.’

‘I hadn’t ; it was all my naughtiness. O Percy ! I *am* sorry. Won’t you say you forgive me ? I shall never be happy if you don’t.’

‘Won’t you ? Then, pray, be happy directly. I don’t think my forgiveness necessary ; but if you ask for it, you may be sure you have it.’

‘For all? For everything? For it isn’t only to-night I’ve been so bad; it’s all this week. I’ve tormented you, and done everything I could to vex you, because I was angry with Isabel. Oh dear, I wish I were not so wicked! When I once get angry, I don’t know what I do. And I’ve been dreadfully provoking to you, and done all sorts of things that I knew you didn’t like. I’m very sorry now. I think, Percy, please, that if you’ll forgive me, I’ll never do it again. I’ll try and be much better.’

‘My dear Lisa, don’t look so penitent,’ he said, with an attempt at a laugh; ‘you are not in the confessional, nor have I seen anything of the “wickedness” you talk of. I am sorry Isabel vexed you so much the other day, but I know it was unintentionally she did it. If she had known you were there, she would not have said what she did; she wanted me to tell you she was sorry, and that she should be very glad if you would go whenever you like.’

‘Why didn’t she tell me so herself, then?’ thought Lisa, though she did not say so. She only answered, ‘Never mind about her, it’s only you I care for; and if you forgive me, and will forget how bad I’ve been the last few days, I don’t want anything else. Will you shake hands with me, please, and let us be quite friends?’

Percy smiled as he held out his hand, and they parted on most amicable terms.

‘I’ve brought you my drawing to look at,’ Lisa said the next day. ‘It’s done now,—I worked at it a whole hour this morning; and I don’t think it’s very badly done either. What do you say? And,’—looking at him with a mixture half of fun, half of shyness,—‘my throat is well again; Mary and I are going to have some singing by and by. I think you may as well come and listen to us, and then I can give you some tea afterwards. You will find it pleasanter up-stairs with us than sitting here by yourself.’

Her naughtiness and caprice were gone for the time; and, being only anxious to make amends for her late waywardness, she took the greatest pains to please him, and became as docile as the most obedient child. And he, only too delighted at this new change for the better, forgot the annoyances of the past week—forgot that she could be anything but what she then was, and thought her more charming than ever. How often, indeed, he was dreaming of her when he ought to have been thinking of other things would have been hard to say, but if Isabel’s com-

plaints at that time of his frequent distractions were to be believed, they must have been something alarming. They certainly gave her great cause for dissatisfaction, although she was puzzled to account for them.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A TALK, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

ONE afternoon Lisa was busy with a French lesson in her own room. She liked to take her books there, for she could learn better when alone, and, moreover, she was fond of her little closet. The great charm of the place must have consisted in its being her own, for there was nothing else to make it attractive. It was very small, and poorly furnished. The floor, with the exception of one narrow strip of carpet, was bare; the walls were unpapered, and the bed was without hangings. A little chest of drawers, a little wash-hand stand, and one little chair made up the furniture, and not much taste had been consulted in the choice of these articles. Anything would do for Lisa, said Mrs Tennent, on the principle, most probably, that beggars must not be choosers; and if Lisa thought she would have liked some things different, she did not say so, and consoled herself with the reflection that the place was her own, and she could do what she liked there. And if the room did look rather bare sometimes, in the early morning, when the tapping of the lime-tree boughs upon her window roused her from her slumbers before it was time to get up, she did not mind it, for she could hear the first notes of the birds in the garden, and see the sunlight playing on the green leaves as the breezes stirred them; and these sights and sounds brought thoughts of other happy things, and carried her from her dingy room in the midst of a crowded town, to country meadows and country woods far away, over which the free winds were blowing, and where wild-flowers were springing and green boughs waving, whose beauty would never be soiled by the dust and smoke that so soon darkened the Priory trees. Now, although it was only the end of June, the freshness of these had passed away, and they had settled down into the sombre aspect which

they always wore in the long, hot months. Beautiful, however, Lisa thought them, for they were old friends—she had watched them bud, and come to leaf, and fade, for many and many a year—and familiar things have always a beauty of their own. She liked to sit and look up into their deep recesses—to hear the loud humming of the bees among their flowers, and to catch glimpses of blue sky between their leaves; and she liked to look beyond them, and see the jackdaws wheeling round the tower of the old Priory Church, whose grey massive walls, mantling ivy, and hourly chimes had been objects of the deepest interest ever since the day when, as a little child, she had first seen and heard them. On a summer's day like the present—when the glory that was haunting the country penetrated even the dusky town; when the sunshine was lying in a golden flood upon the lawn, and soft airs crept by, hardly raising the leaves as they passed; when there was a perfect chorus of insect life among the trees, and the stir and tumult in the busy streets sounded far off and indistinct—on such a day as this she could have sat for hours in the dreamy luxury of doing nothing. Perhaps it was the consciousness that she had been indulging too long in this luxury that made her now keep her eyes fixed so resolutely on her book, while she conned the long piece of Racine's 'Mithridate' which Madame Ricard had given her to learn. She was going over her lesson very diligently, when a little stone alighting on the page before her made her look up. Percy was standing in the green walk below.

'Come down, Lisa; I want you,' he said. 'What are you doing there?'

'Learning a French lesson for Madame,'—and she held up her book.

'Never mind the French! Put it away now, I want you.'

'Why, Percy,' and she looked very much astonished, 'that isn't like you! You always tell me to finish my work before I begin to amuse myself. Besides, Mary told me to be sure and learn this before I did anything else. I must do it, I think'—She hesitated.

'Yes, of course; you are right. Well, come when you are ready, then; you won't be long, I suppose?'

'Not very; I'll make haste. But what do you want me for? Anything particular?'

'I'll tell you when you come. You'll find me at the bottom of the walk.' And he turned away.

'I wonder what it is?' Lisa thought. 'Something pleasant, I am sure; for I saw him smiling.' And stopping her arts once more, she pored over her book until the lesson was learnt, and had been said from beginning to end without a mistake; then dashing the volume on the floor (that was an accident, for she meant to throw it on the bed), away she went. Her foot was strong now, and she took her accustomed jump at the bottom of the stairs, and then flew through the garden door into the green walk, where, true to his promise, she found Percy waiting. She danced up to him.

'Here I am! I've done at last; and very glad I am. And now I hope you have some pleasant news to tell me. You look as if you had, and I am sure I want something to refresh me after that horrid Racine. How I wish that man had never been born! He's the plague of my life. But what do you want me for? Have you anything to tell me?'

'Yes, I have. Didn't you say this morning that you would like to go with us to Hazeldean next Thursday?'

Lisa looked at him doubtfully—'Yes, I did. I should like it beyond everything. But what do you mean? I know I can't go.'

'Do you? I am not so sure of that. Unless you wish to stay at home, I don't think there will be anything to prevent you. Mrs Tennent has no objection to your going.'

'No objection? Aunt Helen? She will let me go?' Lisa exclaimed, not very coherent in her surprise and joy. 'But no; you can't be in earnest! It must be a mistake!' and her face, which had brightened up with eagerness, sobered down again.

'No; I shouldn't tell you such a thing, Lisa, if you were likely to be disappointed. It is not a mistake. I asked Mrs Tennent myself, and she told me she would let you. You will hear it from her by and by.'

Lisa's face flushed with mingled astonishment and delight. 'You asked her? Then it's your doing, Percy? You did it because you knew I should like it!'

He smiled. 'That was my reason, Lisa. I wasn't wrong, was I? It will give you pleasure to go?'

'Pleasure! Oh, so much!'—and she looked up at him with a very radiant face. 'I am so glad, so pleased—so—oh! I don't know what—only I shall like it so very much. And it was very kind of you to get me the pleasure. I wonder,

though, what made you think of it—why, indeed, you so often think of what will please me?’

‘Do I?’ he said, ‘I am glad to hear it. Do you think it so very strange, though, that any one should wish to please you?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t fancy many people do. Mary does, but she couldn’t have done such a thing as this if she had wished it ever so much. Aunt Helen would not have let me go if she had asked. But, oh dear! I can hardly believe it. Fancy seeing the castle and the beautiful woods there, and dining out of doors, and dancing in the evening! How delightful it will be! Percy, I am so much obliged to you for asking for me. But you are always doing things for me; is there nothing I can do for you?—nothing that will give you a little pleasure?’

‘And you think it is not pleasure enough, then, to see you pleased, Lisa?’

‘Oh no, I don’t. I know you like to please me, or you wouldn’t take so much trouble to do it. But’——

‘But you think so much of a little, that you feel quite oppressed by the amount of gratitude that is burdening you. Well, you shall pay me if you like, Lisa; you shall give me a great pleasure.’

‘Yes. What is it?’ with great eagerness.

‘Will you keep two dances for me on Thursday?’

Lisa looked very much amused. ‘To be sure I will; as many as you like. But I didn’t know you cared for dancing.’

‘Didn’t you? It depends on my partner. I don’t care to dance with everybody; but when I know and like a person, it is very different. Don’t forget you are engaged for the first two.’

‘No, I won’t; but, as far as that goes, I could dance with you the whole evening, for nobody else is likely to ask me.’

‘Are they not?’ he said. ‘You will not have more difficulty in getting partners, I suppose, than any one else.’

Lisa shook her head. ‘I shall be so much younger than any one else,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know the people. There is Mr Watts, to be sure; perhaps he may ask me: and—Mr Thorpe—oh! I had forgotten him.’

‘It would be much pleasanter; I should enjoy it a good deal more if they were not here,’ she said, after a pause.

'They! Who are they?'

'Mr Thorpe, and—and Isabel. Percy, I am very sorry, but I am sure she will never like me. It's something in myself, I know, but I can't help it. She makes me angry. I was very angry last night,' alluding to something that had passed the day before. 'You saw it, I suppose?'

'I saw you did not like what she said. But I think you misunderstood her, Lisa. She did not intend to vex you.'

Lisa put up her shoulder a little pettishly; but after a moment she said humbly, 'I was wrong, I know; I thought so afterwards. And,'—with a sigh—'I suppose what she said was true. I ought to take a great deal more pains about many things than I do. You think so too, don't you?'

'I do, Lisa,' he said frankly; 'I think it a great pity you don't pay more attention to some of the little things which make up a large part of a woman's duties. It is a woman's business, is it not, to make home as pleasant as possible; and how can she do that if she does not make herself attractive, by cultivating every gift she has? Let it be beauty, or talents, or pleasing manners, she may be quite sure it has been given her for some good purpose, and that she is bound to make the most of it. If she does not do so, if she takes no trouble to give pleasure to those about her by studying the little things—the little elegancies that make all the difference in home life—she is not doing her duty. She is wasting the good things that have been given her.'

Lisa was silent for a few minutes; she was looking rather surprised. 'You think, then, that women ought to make a great deal of themselves, and of everything they have? That would make them very vain, wouldn't it?'

'Why should it, if it is done from a right motive? The thing is, that so many women are not content with making themselves as pretty and agreeable as they can in their own homes; they go out to look for admiration from strangers. They will spend a fortune in dressing to go into society, but anything is good enough for home, where there is only a brother or a husband to see them. That comes from vanity, if you like, Lisa; but a woman who takes trouble to make herself look nice for those she loves, will not be vain, you may be quite sure.'

'No, I shouldn't think she would. But then a great many women can't do as they like; perhaps they haven't the money

to make themselves look as nice as they would if they were richer.'

'Very likely not ; there are a great many of course in that case ; but I was talking of those who have the means. If people are able to spend so much when they go out, let them spare a little for home too ; and if they have not enough for both, let home come first, I say. But, after all, it is not so much what they spend, as how they spend it ; and taste and care will make a woman look well dressed on very little. And I never like to see any one without that care, for I think she can be doing little towards making her home pleasant.'

Lisa was silent again ; she stood leaning against a tree, pulling to pieces some flowers which she had gathered as they walked. There was a deep blush on her face ; and when she looked up at last, it was with some embarrassment.

'I am very sorry, Percy. I never thought about these things before. Of course, I knew I was careless, and that I ought to be neat and take pains about a great many things that I didn't ; but still it never came into my head it would make so much difference, or that I was not doing my duty at home. And you say you don't like any one who does not do that. I'm very sorry.'

'My dear Lisa, I didn't mean that for you ; you must not think so. I said "a woman," and although,—with a smile,—'I suppose you can lay claim to the title in one way, yet you are young enough to make yourself what you like ; and, from what I know of you, I am quite sure that what you will like will be to make yourself everything a woman ought to be. No one would think of judging you at present as they would a grown-up person. A year or two, you will find, will make a great difference to you in many ways.'

'Yes,' a little doubtfully. 'I needn't wait a year or two, though, to make a difference in one way ;' and she glanced at her dress. 'I shall not be much older to-morrow than to-day, but you shall not see me so untidy again. I can't help it if my things are not so pretty as I should like, because I don't choose them myself ; but still I can put them on properly, and I can make my collars look nice. I can plait my hair, too, as I do Mary's sometimes ; and you said once when I had done it, how well it looked, and you wished I would do mine the same way.'

'Yes, I remember. You have such beautiful hair, Lisa.' He



said it gravely, as if he were stating a fact, not paying a compliment; nor did she take it as one, though she looked very much pleased.

‘I am so glad you like it!’ she said simply.

‘Yes, I like it better than any I have ever seen; that shade of golden brown is so very uncommon. I recollect noticing it the first night I came home. You were sitting talking to Arthur, I remember, for a long time, and the light from the lamp was on your head. You looked very bright that evening, Lisa; you made a very pretty picture,’ he added, with a smile.

Lisa half smiled too, but her colour rose. The thought of that evening, and of all the foolish things she had then said, was not very pleasant, and she would have been very glad to forget it entirely.

She went away now full of plans for carrying out her new resolutions; and any one who on the following morning had seen the earnestness with which she set to work to make the most of her simple dress, would have smiled at the alteration which a few hours had effected in her ideas. Not a hair now was out of its place, and every plait was carefully arranged (she was so glad Percy liked her hair, she wondered whether he liked anything else about her too), and then clean collar and cuffs were put on, and a waist-band hunted up from an indescribable wilderness of rubbish in one of her drawers; and when her toilet was completed she surveyed herself with much satisfaction in the cracked looking-glass. She really did look very nice, there was no mistake about it; the only thing she seemed to want was a ribbon for her neck; but sundry calculations of the money allowed her for boots, gloves, &c., soon proved that this was out of the question; she had only just enough to carry her through the quarter, with one shilling left over, which she meant to spend on a little tea for an old woman she knew. The new ribbon must be given up therefore. After all, it did not matter very much, she would get a few flowers instead; so she went to the garden, and gathering a moss-rose bud and one or two green leaves, fastened them in the top of her dress in the place of a brooch. At the foot of the stairs, on her return, she came upon Percy.

‘Good morning, sir,’ she said, making him a curtsy, ‘How do I look to-day? Tell me what you think of me. Do I want anything else?’

He put up his glass, and surveyed her from head to foot.

‘I never saw anything look better, Lisa,’ he said, gravely ; ‘you are perfect.’

Her laugh was a merry one. ‘Perfect ! In a cotton dress ! ‘O Percy ! I’m afraid your taste is not perfect. I might have something twenty times prettier.

‘Might you ? Ah, yes, perhaps so. But I was not thinking of your dress.’

‘Not thinking of my dress ! And when I asked you particularly to look at it !’—and she made a pretence of pouting a little. ‘What were you thinking of, then ? The best way will be to leave you to yourself, and then you can think as much as you please. I beg your pardon for interrupting you at all. Good-bye.’

‘Lisa has gone into the other extreme now,’ was Isabel’s remark when the change in her cousin’s dress was first commented on. ‘From untidiness she has gone into coquettishness. I hope that is not your doing, Percy ; I notice she pays more attention to you than she does to anybody else.’

‘Does she ?’—and the change in her brother’s face did not escape Isabel’s quick eye. ‘What is the matter with her dress ? I thought I never saw her look better than she did at breakfast.’

‘No ; and she knew it. I felt quite sorry I had ever said a word to her about being careless ; I would rather she had remained so all her life than see her turn out vain and giddy. We want no more of that kind of thing in our family ; we know the consequences of it only too well.’

Percy’s brow clouded. ‘I don’t think you know what you are talking about, Isabel. One might as well associate such thoughts with the child just born as with Lisa. She is as innocent as girl can be, and without a spark of vanity in her.’

‘Perhaps so—at present,’ Isabel answered, pointedly ; ‘but she is like her mother—too like, both in face and manner ; I should be sorry to trust the happiness of any one I cared for to her keeping.’

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE HAZELDEAN WOODS.

THURSDAY, the day of the pic-nic, came, and a glorious day it was ; fine enough to satisfy even Lisa, who at a very early hour that morning was in the garden, to investigate the appearance of the sky. But she could see no cause to fear any change in the lovely weather which had lately set in ; and although there was a good deal of mist about, and the sky wore rather a grey and sombre look, she knew these were tokens of heat, not of rain, and that they would pass away as the day advanced. And so they did ; and between nine and ten o'clock the sun had come out in such splendour, that the only apprehension felt by any one was lest it should be too hot for enjoyment. But Lisa had no such forebodings. Once satisfied that there was no fear of rain, she was convinced that everything would be delightful ; and when the carriages came to the door, her spirits were at a pitch far beyond the reach of all petty discomforts. Not even the dust and heat of the long drive, nor a back seat opposite her aunt in a barouche, instead of going with Percy, as she had hoped, in their own little carriage, could at all affect her ; and she contrived to amuse herself so well with her own observations on everything they passed, that her face was the brightest and most joyous-looking of all the party that met in what had once been the court-yard of Hazeldean Castle.

A very large party they were. She did not know a quarter of them, and would have felt utterly bewildered by the number of strange faces, had not Percy taken her under his protection. Suggestions for an exploring expedition, and for mounting to the top of one of the towers, were soon set on foot, and the proposal finding great favour among the younger members of the party, nearly all of them prepared to carry it out. Large as the numbers were, however, who began the scramble to the top of the old castle, there were not many who really accomplished it. Only a venturesome few gained the summit, and of these Lisa was one ; being the first, indeed, to set her foot on the highest point to be reached ; and as she did so, she burst into exclamations of wonder and delight at the prospect that lay before her.

It was said that five counties were to be seen from the turrets

of Hazeldean Castle ; and certainly, in the extensive view that stretched away in the dim distance, it was not difficult to believe that this was the case ; but it was the landscape nearer at hand that most attracted the attention, so beautiful did it look in the light of that glorious summer's day. Hill and valley, green woods heavy with their July foliage, sparkling streams that wound their way like silver threads through far-off meadows, sunny corn-fields, and sloping pasture-lands, all lay basking in the soft, misty haze of noonday ; while the blue sky above them, dark in the intensity of its unfathomable depths, was unstreaked by a single cloud. When her first burst of surprise and delight was over, Lisa could only stand and look with feelings that took away the power of speaking ; and Percy, who was by her side, saw the tears gathering in her eyes, though she smiled and blushed a little when she found he had noticed them.

‘I can't help it,’ she said, in a low voice ; ‘beautiful things always make me cry ;’ she gave a long sigh, ‘I never could have fancied anything half as lovely as this.’

He smiled, but made no answer ; and they stood together in silence, while a very animated discussion was going on between the others, who had not much attention to bestow on the nearer view. They were intent upon looking out for certain spires and other landmarks by which the different counties might be distinguished ; and there was a good deal of grumbling at the ‘misty light of the day,’ and ‘that provoking haze,’ which prevented their seeing objects that ought to have been visible.

‘Very stupid this,’ said Cunninghame Thorpe, coming up to Lisa and speaking in an injured tone. ‘I had no idea we shouldn't see more, or I should never have come up at all. By Jove, what a pull ! And for nothing, too ! One might just as well have stayed at the bottom for what there is to look at.’ He seated himself on the parapet as he spoke, and looked down rather dolefully, as if taking in all the toils and pains of descent, while Lisa regarded him with some amusement, not unmixed with scorn.

‘I wonder,’ she said, ‘you didn't send some one first to ascertain whether the view were worth looking at before you ventured so far ; it would have saved you so much fatigue. For my part, I wouldn't have missed coming for anything ; it is far more beautiful than I could ever have imagined.’ And her eye went back to that summer scene as if she could never tire of gazing at it.

Cunninghame looked at her for a moment or two, as if not quite sure whether she were in earnest.

'You have never been abroad, have you?' he asked. 'No? ah, I thought not; you wouldn't think much of this kind of scenery if you had.'

'Then I am very glad I never have!'

'But why?' asked Mary, who was standing by, 'why shouldn't we care for this if we had been abroad? I should think that seeing foreign scenery, however grand it may be, would only make one appreciate all the more quiet home beauty like this. I don't know why we are to despise it because it bears no resemblance to a Swiss or Italian view.'

'Oh, no, certainly not; it's all very well in its way; but,' with a half-suppressed yawn, 'when one becomes accustomed to the grand and sublime, one is apt to find this kind of scenery rather tame. I don't fancy you would meet with many people to care for it who had been among the Alps or Pyrenees.'

'Do you think so?' said Mary. 'I should have thought it was just the contrary. Beauty is beauty wherever it is; and when the eye and the taste have been cultivated as they ought to be by travelling, one would think they would be all the quicker to find it out even in common scenes, where it might be passed over by those who have never been trained to look for it.'

'Perhaps so. I daresay you are right,' said Cunninghame deferentially. 'But I am afraid the experience of people in general would go against your argument. However, I suppose we are going down now, are we not? unless any one has a fancy for being baked alive up here. Allow me to go first and help you down those steps, they are not safe by any means. I think if one is obliged to mount these kind of places, they ought to be kept in repair. I should like to know how many accidents happen here in a year.'

No accident took place now, in spite of Mr Thorpe's evident anticipations of some such event, and the descent was accomplished in perfect safety by everybody. Dinner was the next thing to be thought of, and was, to judge from appearances, far more appreciated by the company in general than their scrambling expedition had been; while Lisa, much as she had enjoyed that, thought that nothing could be more delightful than dining

under the shade of the trees, with the long grass waving round them, and the little brook that rushed at their feet dancing in the sunshine. It was everything she had expected; the single drawback being that she saw nothing of Percy; Mr Thorpe having taken Elinor and herself under his care, and her cousin being engaged with some one else. But when dinner was over, and parties were forming for walking or amusing themselves, he came up to her.

‘You will like to see something of the woods, Lisa, won’t you? Will you go to the dripping well?’

‘Yes, oh, yes; I should like it exceedingly,’ she said, springing up joyfully. It was one of the principal places to be visited at Hazeldean, and she had often heard of it. She would like to have started at once, but it appeared that Isabel and some others wished to go also, and as Percy knew more about the road than any one else, they were obliged to wait while several young ladies were deciding whether they would accompany them or not. Most of them, however, settled that the distance was too great, and the party was reduced at length to themselves, Janet, Isabel, Elinor, and two friends of the latter of the name of Fraser, merry, good-natured girls, who had sat near Lisa at dinner, and had half amused, half puzzled her by the nonsense they talked, and the bantering conversation they had carried on with Mr Thorpe whenever they could get his attention. A great deal of what they had said had been utterly unintelligible to her, but she had been entertained even when she could not understand the drift of their speeches; and as they talked to her also, and seemed disposed to be sociable, she was not inclined to dislike them. Cunninghame and another gentleman made up the party, and after some delay they all set out; Percy and herself, however, getting on so much faster than the others, that they were soon far in advance of them; and when they came to a turn in the road, she made a pause.

‘We had better wait for them, hadn’t we?’ she said. ‘Look how far they are behind; they will lose their way altogether if we get out of sight.’

‘They can’t go wrong when they are once here,’ Percy remarked, clearing the brook himself, and helping her to cross the slippery stones which were laid down in the middle of it. ‘When they are in the path on this side we can get on as fast as we like; and as I know you don’t mind a little rough walking,

I'll take you by a short cut, which will be much pleasanter than the straight road. Shall we try it ?

'Yes, if you like ; I don't mind scrambling. It's not so fatiguing to me as it is to Mr Thorpe. "By Jove, what a pull, and all for nothing!"' she said, imitating his tones. 'Poor fellow ! I pity him for finding things such a trouble ; he must lose a great deal of pleasure. But I think, if we are going to have much scrambling, I had better fasten up my dress ; you wouldn't like to see me dancing in shreds and tatters this evening.'

'No ; indeed ! I thought you told me the other day you had nothing pretty to wear, but that is pretty enough for anything. I never saw anybody look better than you do now, Lisa.'

She smiled. 'I am glad you think so ; for I took a great deal of trouble this morning to make myself look nice. I knew you would like it.'

She fastened up her dress, and they sauntered slowly on until they saw the others fairly started in the right path, when they left the road and struck off into the deep recesses of the wood. Following the windings of the brook, sometimes on the high ground above its banks, and sometimes on the very brink of its waters, they wandered on under the tall trees, and through shady glades, where the grass grew high, and the fern and the foxglove flourished in abundance ; and where Lisa went wild with the luxuriant loveliness of all around. She ran about, uttering exclamations of delight and wonder as each turn revealed some fresh beauty, and every step showed some flower or plant she had never met with before. The only drawback to her pleasure was that Mary was not there to share it with her.

'What a pity she is not with us ! How I wish she had come !' she exclaimed, when, tired at last, she stopped to recover her breath. 'But we can take back some of these flowers for her ; she will be so pleased with them. And—O Percy, do get me some of that beautiful blue flower growing there in the water. What can it be ? The true forget-me-not, I do believe. How lovely it is !'

The true forget-me-not it turned out to be ; and Percy, who had been making a selection of the prettiest flowers he could find, proceeded to mix some of it with them, and then arranging them all with the greatest care, he made them up into a bouquet

which, for taste and beauty, if not for richness of colour and perfume, might have rivalled any garden blossoms.

‘There it is, Lisa,’ he said, as he put the finishing touch to it. ‘You like wild flowers, I know. Will it be good enough for this evening?’

‘Good enough! It is beautiful. How well you have arranged them. But, Percy, I must not be the only lady with one this evening; can’t we make another for Mary? I have plenty of flowers here, and if you will get me some of that pretty green you have put with mine, we shall have one all ready for her.’

Percy did as he was asked; and when Lisa, with great glee, had made up another bouquet for her cousin, they resumed their walk, and, after some more scrambling, came out upon some rising ground not far from the spot they had come to see. They decided to wait there for the rest of the party, and as there were no signs of their approach, and a fallen tree offered a convenient seat, they sat down, not sorry to rest after their long walk. It was one of the most beautiful places they could have chosen for the purpose, on the summit of a knoll above the stream whose banks they had followed, and whose waters bubbled and danced below in alternate light and shade. Behind them rose high rocks whose recesses were tapestried with lichens and pale green feathery ferns, and over their heads the ash-tree and the beech mingled their branches, and shut out the scorching rays of the afternoon sun. Here and there, however, there came down a bright beam or two on the long grass and the tangled brushwood; and through the heavy foliage an occasional glimpse might be caught of the azure sky above. Some few insects hovered where the sunlight fell, and now and then a bee murmured past; but the woods were very still, for the birds were sheltering from the heat, and even the topmost leaves of the trees drooped idly, for there was no wind to stir them. The breezes had strayed away that day, and silence and rest seemed to have settled on everything. Lisa herself sat silent and still, looking at the scene around her, and listening to a description which Percy gave her of the forests of Jamaica where he had once been. She could see it all in imagination—the grand old trees with trunks like massive columns; the light that came down, soft and green, through their leafy arches; the festoons of trailing creepers drooping from their boughs; and the solemn gloom that brooded over all. In fancy she walked among them, and felt the warm,



damp air steaming up from the moist ground beneath her feet ; and saw the tall ferns waving round her in thousands and myriads. And in fancy, after long wanderings through the forest, she emerged from its shadows, and trod more open ground, brilliant with flowers of gorgeous colours, and alive with butterflies and insects more gorgeous still ; while, all about her, among the purple blossoms, and the bright green leaves, black and golden humming-birds were flitting in countless numbers. Or she went higher still, and heard in lonely wilds the ‘ Miserere ’ chanted in sweet unearthly tones by the *solitaire*, and watched the yellow light glitter on untrod mountain peaks, and on the distant sea. She sat wrapt in a sort of trance as those far-off scenes rose, one by one, before her in all the splendour of their tropical beauty—beauty of which she might have read a hundred times, and never have realised it as she did, while listening to the glowing words with which Percy clothed his descriptions. And when he paused at length, she started, to find herself so far away from the mountains and forests where, in fancy, she had been wandering ; sitting instead in an English wood, with English wild flowers and English trees around her, and in place of the purple ocean, a little babbling brook at her feet, with green banks above it, and low shrubs dipping into its waters. Percy, who had been watching her while he was speaking, smiled at the expression of her face.

‘ What are you thinking of, Lisa ? ’ he asked.

‘ Thinking of ? Of what you were telling me—of those places, and how beautiful they must be. I was half wishing I could see them all.’

‘ Only half wishing ! You do not want to leave England, then ? But would it be very hard for you to do so if you were obliged—would you mind it very much ? ’

Lisa looked up in some surprise, but it was more at the tone in which this was said than at the words themselves.

‘ I don’t know. But why—why do you ask ? I shall never have to go, shall I ? unless—yes, I had forgotten that—perhaps when I am a governess I may be obliged. Oh, I shouldn’t like it at all ; I should be so far away from the Priory : I hope I never shall.’

‘ I did not mean that, Lisa. You might go with some one you cared for—some one who cared for you—would that make a difference ? Would you dislike going then ? ’

Lisa looked at him. 'No, I don't think so ; I should not mind where I went with any one I cared for. But that is the worst of being a governess : you can't be with the people you care for ; I never knew till lately how hard that must be, because I never felt before how much the Priory is like a home to me. That has been your doing, Percy ; it is you who have made it so ; it has been a different place since you came, and it will be very different to me again when you go.' There was something of sadness in her tone.

'Well, I am not going yet, Lisa,' he answered lightly. 'I stay till October now, you know.'

'Yes, I am very glad. And I hope when you go, it will not be where there is any fighting. I used to like to hear of battles and glory, but I don't now, and I wish there was nothing of the sort. I can't bear it.'

'What, not the glory, Lisa ? You, who are so excited when you read of heroic deeds, and who look as if you were ready to march to battle yourself when you hear stirring music ; you to say that you don't care for glory ! That must be a mistake.'

'No, it isn't. I like glory very much, and I like to hear of brave things that have been done when I know the danger is over ; but I don't like to hear of them when some one I care for is in the midst of it all ; and that would always be the case now, you know, if you ever went where there was fighting. I shouldn't think of honour or glory then ; I should only be thinking of you.'

Percy was silent. He rose suddenly and stood for a moment as if irresolute ; and then, as she got up too, believing that he had seen the others coming, he turned to her in ill-disguised agitation.

'It's no use, Lisa ; I can't let it go on. I must tell you, and if—— He paused, for she was looking at him with such astonishment, with such utter unconsciousness of what might be coming, that his resolution failed him. He, Percy Tennent, who had faced death in a hundred forms on the battle-field, who had marched up to the cannon's mouth, and not known what fear was, felt his courage going when about to say a few words to his little cousin—a child almost in years, but to him a woman, and, in all the world, the first and the dearest. He trembled to think of the happiness or misery that must be staked on the

answer to those few words. He hesitated whether to risk so much when it was plain, from her very freedom from embarrassment, she had no suspicion of his feelings towards her. He felt he would have given anything at that moment to see her blush, or show any sign of confusion. But she did not: her eye met his with the same confiding gaze with which she always looked at him; and the expression uppermost in her face was that of simple surprise.

'What is it?' she said, finding that he was still silent; 'what must you tell me?' and her tone became a little uneasy.

'Nothing to frighten you,' he said. 'No, Lisa; I only hesitated because I don't know that I have any right to ask what I wish: I am not at all sure how you'—— He paused again, for voices were heard close at hand. 'Ah, well, it's too late now;' and whether he felt most vexed or relieved at the interruption, he could hardly have told. 'I ought to have spoken sooner.'

Lisa looked at him. 'It is something bad, Percy; I am sure it is. I can see it in your face. It is something you don't like.'

He half smiled. 'It will depend upon you, Lisa, whether it is good or bad for me,' he said, beginning to walk on.

'On me!' she exclaimed, in the utmost astonishment; but she had no time to ask any more questions, for the others were ascending the slope; and no sooner were they within speaking distance than inquiries began as to how long the two had been there, which way they had come, and what they had been doing—inquiries which Lisa had to answer, for Percy scarcely seemed to hear what was passing.

'And so you came by a short cut?' said Kate Fraser, turning to Lisa with a little laugh; 'I suppose you had a pleasant walk?'

'Yes, very pleasant; delightful it was. We came by the brook; and you have no idea how pretty it is down there, close to the water.'

'Is it? I wonder, then, that you did not ask us to go with you, instead of going off alone with Captain Tennent; it would have been much kinder, wouldn't it, Martha?' looking with a smile at her sister.

'Nonsense, Kate; how could you expect it? When people are in pleasant company they don't remember those kind of

things. And Captain Tennent can be very agreeable when he likes—he is not always so grave as he is just now,’ with a glance at Percy.

There was no answer to this from Lisa : she did not understand what amused them so much ; but she saw that the joke, whatever it was, was at her expense, and she felt rather inclined to be vexed.

Kate laughed again as she watched her, and then seeing that she was really distressed, turned her attention to her flowers.

‘But how did you manage to get so many? We hardly saw any as we came along, and I am so fond of flowers! I wish you would give me a few of yours.’

‘Oh, yes, as many as you like,’ Lisa began, eagerly, but stopping suddenly as she was about to undo them. ‘At least—I forgot. I’m very sorry—but—I didn’t get them myself, and’——

‘And you would rather not give them away. Of course not.’ Kate’s eyes were brimming over with amusement. ‘I beg your pardon for asking for them. Captain Tennent got them, I suppose?’

‘Yes, and he took so much trouble to arrange them that I don’t like to—I mean—you should have them directly if I had got them myself, but’——

‘My dear, I quite understand. You needn’t trouble yourself to make excuses; I really don’t care about them. I am sorry I asked for them at all.’

And with another glance at her sister, and at Isabel, who was standing by, she walked off, leaving Lisa looking at her flowers in no very comfortable frame of mind, though why she felt so much annoyed she hardly knew. She had not much time, however, to indulge in unpleasant reflections, for there was a general move again. The dripping-well was only a few minutes’ walk from the place, and every one was anxious to get to it.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

‘SHE WAS A WOMAN NOW.’

THE party were starting when Janet Darrell came up to Lisa and put her arm in hers.

‘Will you walk with me, Lisa? I want to speak to you particularly.’

Lisa was surprised, but she had no objection to make, and they set out together, Janet saying nothing until the others were out of hearing. Then she turned round with a smile.

‘You won’t be offended with me, will you, if you shouldn’t happen to like what I am going to say?’

‘Offended!’ Lisa’s tone was a little uneasy. She began to wonder what was coming.

‘You must not think me meddling,’ Janet went on. ‘If you were not half so much of a child as you are, I should not think of saying a word to you. It’s because I am sure you don’t know what you are doing that I wish to put you on your guard. You don’t want to get talked about, I am certain.’

Lisa looked bewildered. ‘I don’t know what you mean. Who is to talk of me? What have I done?’

Janet smiled a little. ‘Nothing very bad. I told you I was only wishing to give you a warning.’ And then, changing her tone, ‘Why didn’t you keep with us as we were coming here, instead of walking off alone with Captain Tennent?’

‘Why? I don’t know. We got on before you, and he asked me to go the short way with him. Was there any harm in it?’

‘No harm exactly, but I think it would have been better if you had stayed with us;’ and then, seeing that Lisa still looked perplexed, ‘Pray, what relation is he to you, my dear?’

‘What relation? Why, Mrs Darrell, you know, he’s my cousin. What makes you ask?’

‘Only because you treat him as if he were something much nearer.’

‘Do I?’ said Lisa, slowly, as if considering. ‘But, yes, I suppose I do. I have no brother of my own, but he is just as good as one to me.’

‘Perhaps so; but if you choose to consider him in that light, other people don’t forget he is only a cousin; and, excuse me--- but I think a little more reserve with him would be better.’

'A little more reserve? But why? He wouldn't like it. What has he done?'

'My dear Lisa, don't be so innocent. If I didn't know you, I should say you were pretending to misunderstand me. You are not such a child as not to see that you can't be so free and easy with him without attracting attention. In short, if you must have it out plainly, there is such a thing as cousins falling in love.'

Lisa was silent, but it was not because she misunderstood now. Her face and neck were crimson in a moment.

'You must not be angry with me,' Janet went on; 'I only intended to give you a hint, that you may take care what you are doing. Unless, indeed, he has ever said anything to'——

'He has never said a word to me about such a thing; never, never, never!' Lisa exclaimed, in the utmost distress. 'He never has.'

'My dear, you needn't be so vehement. I was only going to say that if you and he understand each other, that would make a difference. But if, as you say, you are nothing more than cousins, I think it would be quite as well to treat him as one. You heard what the Frasers said just now; and they are not the only people to-day who have'——

'You needn't go on, Mrs Darrell,' Lisa said, in a choked voice. 'You needn't tell me any more. I know what you mean; I hadn't thought of it before.' She tried to speak quietly, but her words came out with difficulty, and the burning colour in her face grew deeper and deeper.

Janet saw her confusion, but took no notice, and not another word was spoken by either until they reached the dripping-well, when Lisa disengaged herself from her and joined her cousin Elinor. Her heightened colour and disturbed appearance would most certainly have attracted attention, had not all been too busy, talking and admiring, to look at her. But wild and beautiful as the scenery was, and much as she had always longed to see it, it was completely lost upon her. Rocks, woods, and water all lay before her in romantic loveliness; but if any one had asked her what she saw, she could not have told them, for wherever she went she found Percy at her side. She was afraid to look at, almost even to speak to him; and not thinking that such a sudden change was likely to make herself remarked, she grew stiff and constrained, and gave such short answers to everything he said that he looked at her in astonishment. She was glad when Mr Thorpe

came up to point something out to her, and thinking anything better than these miserable attempts to appear unconcerned with her cousin, she gave her new companion so much encouragement that he seemed little inclined to leave her again. He walked back to the castle with her and Elinor, where a surprise was awaiting them. Two gentlemen were there—strangers at first Lisa thought them, until, upon hearing their voices behind them, they turned, and then she discovered that one of them was Arthur Darrell. With an exclamation of joy she sprang forward to meet him.

‘Scaramouch, I declare!’ was his greeting, with an exaggerated expression of her surprise. ‘But,’ surveying her from head to foot, ‘Scaramouch no longer. Well, I never should have believed it! Lisa Kennedy in a whole dress, and looking like the rest of the world! What a transformation!’

‘Nonsense, Arthur; how can you be so ridiculous. But how did you get here, and when did you come?’

‘If you wish to know why we came you must ask the supreme power there,’ looking at his brother. ‘I can give no reason. All I can tell you is, I was fast asleep on three chairs in the dining-room at Gainsford last night, when he woke me up, and said, “I’m going to Atherstone to-morrow, Arthur.” “All right,” I said, and went to sleep again, and here we are.’

‘And they told you at the Priory, I suppose, where we were?’

‘Yes, they said you were having a jollification here; so we thought we would come out and see the fun. We took the train to Stoke, and came through the woods. But where are the others? Janet and Isabel, and’—— with an odd look—‘Le Balafre? By the way, Lisa, how do you get on with him? Do you still confine yourself to “Yes” and “No” when he speaks to you?’

Lisa tried to laugh, but she did not succeed very well; and it was happy for her that the arrival of Janet took off Arthur’s attention from her very visible embarrassment. While every one else talked and laughed, she sat silent and downcast, only intent upon keeping out of the way of Percy. It was not difficult to do, for he was too short-sighted to distinguish her unless she were quite close to him, and among so many people it was hardly likely he would make her out if she chose to avoid him. She did not meet him until after tea, when they were all assembling in the courtyard for dancing, and then she suddenly remembered

that she had promised the first two dances to him. The recollection came just in time, for Mr Thorpe was asking her, and after him came up Arthur and three or four others. She was engaged seven or eight deep before she knew what she was about; but the music was beginning, and people were all taking their places before Percy made his appearance to claim her promise. She rose hurriedly then without a word, and they joined a set that was forming for the opening quadrille.

'You are tired, Lisa,' he remarked. 'That walk this afternoon was too much for you.'

'Was it? No, I don't think so. I don't feel at all tired.'

Poor Lisa! If she had been a little older she would not have been so foolish; she would have known better what to do; but she was shy and frightened, and really did not know how to appear at ease; and matters were not improved by her observing looks of amused intelligence passing between the Frasers, who happened to be in the same set as herself. The first two figures of the dance were gone through in silence, and Percy's next attempt at sociability was not more successful than the first.

'Where are your flowers, Lisa?' he said. 'Have you thrown them away?'

'No, I put them in water somewhere. But I don't want them. I don't care about them now.'

Not very gracious; but, after all, what did it matter? A few flowers given by a cousin were not of any consequence. There was another long pause, which Percy broke once more by saying—

'I wonder what has come to us this evening, that we are both so silent. Any one to see us would say that we had never met before, and didn't know what to talk about. What is the reason we are so stiff and formal? We are not going to be strangers, are we, Lisa?'

The tears rushed to Lisa's eyes, and she was obliged to turn away her head that he might not see them; she could not answer, and felt thankful that the whirl of the concluding galope covered her embarrassment, and saved the necessity of any reply. But when the dance was over, and she would have returned to her seat, Percy detained her.

'Lisa, you have not answered me yet. What is it makes you so strange to-night? I have not displeased you in any way, have I?'

Displeased her! How little fear there was of his ever doing



that she well knew ; but only afraid of betraying her real feelings, she took refuge in her old defiant manner.

‘I am not displeased. I don’t know why you should fancy such a thing ; but I am not obliged to talk, I suppose, if I don’t like.’

‘Certainly not,’ and he drew himself up, and for a moment looked exceedingly proud. ‘Certainly not ; and I am the last person to force you to do so against your wish.’ But pride gave way, and his tone changed to one of entreaty. ‘For Heaven’s sake, Lisa, don’t be so cold to me—don’t let us quarrel for nothing. I have done something—said something that has vexed you. Won’t you tell me what it is ?’

He had caught her hand, and she trembled from head to foot.

‘I am not vexed,’ she said, struggling to free herself. ‘You have done nothing, but—O Percy,’ changing her tone, ‘let me go, I don’t like it ;’ and in an agony of fear lest they should be observed, ‘Let me go, Captain Tennent ; you have no right to make me give reasons for what I do : let me go.’

There was no need for her to repeat her words ; he let her hand fall.

‘“ Captain Tennent ! ” O Lisa ! ’

But she did not wait to answer ; she did not follow the impulse which would have led her to turn back for one more word. The only thing, she felt, was to leave him and try to forget what had passed ; and if excitement could have helped her to do this, she would have succeeded to her heart’s content. She did not sit down the whole evening, and smiled, and talked, and looked as if she had no thought but for the pleasure of the moment. Percy did not ask her to dance again, but he was standing by her once in the pause of a waltz, and her eye happened to meet his. It fell directly ; but Cunninghame Thorpe, who was dancing with her, said something, and she smiled, and looked up again, and with a careless glance at the place where her cousin was standing, she was gone once more.

The long day came to an end. Delightful it had been said by nearly everybody. There were only two who thought differently, and they were silent ; but though Lisa, for one, said nothing about the pleasure she had had, she was among the last of the dancers in the courtyard, and when the carriages came round she had to be looked for. Mrs Tennent was not pleased at the delay.

‘And where is your shawl, child ?’ she said, when Lisa at

length made her appearance with Mr Thorpe. ‘You can’t be driving home at this time of night with only that thin mantle on. Percy, find her shawl for her ; I suppose it was left in the other carriage.’

Lisa started. She had not seen her cousin was so near her ; but without looking at her he went off in search of the missing article. Nor did he speak when he returned with it ; he put it on, and then placing her in the carriage, raised his hat to the party there, and was turning away when Kate Fraser came running up.

‘Here, Miss Kennedy, you are leaving your flowers behind you. I found them in a corner of the courtyard, and I know you prize them particularly.’ She smiled as she threw them into Lisa’s lap. ‘It would have been a pity not to take them ; they are so pretty, and not at all withered.’

Lisa’s face flushed. ‘Not withered, but they are very wet and nasty. I’m sorry you had the trouble of bringing them ; they are not worth anything.’ She tossed them back, and turned away with an air of indifference. They fell on the ground at Percy’s feet, and the carriage wheels passed over them and crushed them in the dust. Fit type of his own crushed and fading hopes.

And all the way home Lisa, silent and unnoticed, was crying bitterly. The long drive seemed as if it would never end, and as trees and hedges passed by in slow succession, she could hardly believe the road was the same by which they had come that morning. But the welcome lights of Atherstone were seen at last, and after that, home was soon reached ; and then, when every one went to the drawing-room, she slipped away to her own little closet.

And there she could think. In her solitude she could go over the whole of the past day ; and when Mary, who slept in the room adjoining hers, had been to say ‘good night,’ then Lisa, no longer afraid of being heard, sat up in her little bed and cried as if her heart would break. For she knew it all now ; Janet’s words had opened her eyes. She knew now all that Percy was to her—all that he had been for so long, while she was still ignorant of the state of her feelings towards him. She trembled, indeed, to think what those feelings were—how very dearly she loved him. What did it matter that he was plain, and silent, and grave ? He was not so to her ; he was everything that was

perfect in her estimation ; and she loved him better, far better, than any one else in the whole world. Her affection for Mary, warm as it was, sank into insignificance when compared with the intensity of that which she felt for him—little as she had known or suspected it until within the last few hours ; and now she had slighted and quarrelled with him, because she was afraid of her real feelings being discovered. For she saw what it was that had made Janet's remarks so unwelcome ; if there had been no truth in them, they would have made but little impression on her.

But now she had found out what he was to her, and never again could she lose the consciousness of it ; never again could she meet him as she had done. How could she walk and talk with him, and tell him all she thought as in the time when she had never feared his knowing what was passing in her mind ? Now she felt as if she could never meet his eye without betraying her secret ; she fancied that every one about her must read it, that all would see the difference that a few hours had made in her. Yes, for that one short day had changed her completely ; she had left the house that morning a light-hearted, unthinking child, and she had come back to it in the evening a woman—with all a woman's doubts and fears crowding upon her. Her days of utter thoughtlessness were gone for ever ; and in that little room, on that still summer's night, with the moonbeams shining on the bare floor and whitewashed walls around her, Lisa bade farewell to her vanished childhood. And many and very bitter were the tears she shed over its memory.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE.

LISA's first conscious thought on waking the next morning was, that it was Percy's birthday. She had been looking forward to it for weeks, and all her leisure lately had been devoted to a drawing, which she had meant to give him on that day. It was not much of a present, certainly ; but it was the only one she could give, for everything else cost money, and she had none ;

so, after much anxious deliberation, she had fixed upon a sketch of the Priory as a thing he was sure to like, and which was, in every way, within the compass of her powers. She had taken it from the far end of the garden, unknown to any one; and had finished it off with great care in her own room. She had hardly known at the time why it was such a happiness to do it, as being specially meant for him; but she knew only too well now how it had been, and as she took the little sketch from the drawer, where it had been lying for some days wrapped in paper, she looked at it for a long time very sadly, then she tore it up—not in anger, but slowly and quietly; and when she had finished—when it was torn into the very smallest atoms and thrown into the grate—then there came a long sob, as if she had wrenched away from her something that was very dear. And then she dressed herself and went down-stairs.

No one else took any notice of the day except Mary. Lisa saw her, just before breakfast, run out to meet Percy as he came across the lawn, and she knew very well what she had gone for. The day before she herself would have run out too; but now she sat still, and when he came into the room, she was so busy talking to Arthur that she appeared to be quite unaware of his entrance. An engagement with a friend took him away before breakfast was over, and she afterwards retired to her ordinary occupations, with a weary thought of the long day before her. It was a day, however, which was not destined to end quite so monotonously as it had begun.

‘We’ll have a dance this evening,’ Arthur remarked, as they came into the drawing-room after dinner. ‘Nelly, go and hunt them all up and tell them what we are going to do, while I get the place into proper trim. Where is Mary? She’ll play for us.’

‘Mary is engaged; she is writing some notes for me,’ Mrs Tennent said. ‘You had better find Lisa; she is the proper person; it is just the thing for her to do.’

‘Eh, but I want Lisa for a partner; I can’t spare her to be exercising her talents on the piano,’ exclaimed Arthur. ‘She wouldn’t like it herself, either. She’d rather dance any day, I know.’

‘I daresay she would, but it’s no consequence what she would rather do. Some one must play, and it is only right she should make herself useful. Susan, go and call your cousin.’

Susan disappeared, and Arthur walked away, not looking particularly pleased.

'Are you engaged, Nelly? I hope not, or I shall have to ask one of the Dacres. Do have compassion on me.'

'So I would,' said Nelly, with a smile. 'But I have promised to dance with Mr Thorpe; I can't think where he is; I wish he would come.'

But Mr Thorpe did not make his appearance, and they were all taking their places.

'But who plays?' everybody was exclaiming. 'Is no one going to the piano? I thought it was to be Lisa Kennedy, but she isn't here.'

'Where is your cousin, Susan? Didn't you tell her she was wanted?' said Mrs Tennent, sharply.

'I can't find her; she is not in the garden, and she's not upstairs; and Mary hasn't seen her,' said Susan, breathless with the run she had had.

'Nonsense, child; she must be somewhere. You have not called her; go again, and make haste.

'Oh, never mind; let Nelly take her place,' exclaimed Arthur. 'She'll come fast enough when she hears the music. It doesn't matter who plays, so that we don't lose all our time waiting.'

'I think it does matter,' said Mrs Tennent, drily. 'It is my wish that Lisa should play. Go directly, Susan; you heard what I said, didn't you?' And Susan went off a second time, while Arthur walked to one of the windows and gave a long whistle.

'Here, Lisa, turn up from somewhere, can't you? All the world's waiting for you.'

There was a minute's silence, and then footsteps were heard on the gravel-walk, and a moment after Lisa came up to the window, out of breath and with a heightened colour.

'Hallo, Scaramouch! what have you been doing? stealing fruit, or otherwise misbehaving yourself? You have a wondrous guilty appearance.'

'Come in, child,' said Mrs Tennent, angrily. 'Why do you always contrive to be out of the way when you are wanted? Susan has been looking everywhere for you. What were you doing?'

'I was in the green-walk,' Lisa murmured, in a voice that was scarcely audible. 'I didn't hear any one call me.'

Mrs Tennent gave her a scrutinising glance. 'Well, come in

now; what are you standing there for, as if you were afraid of showing yourself? Get your music and begin; you have kept them quite long enough.'

Lisa made no answer. She went to the piano, and seemed very busy turning over her music-books. But she was a long time about it, and some of them grew impatient.

'Now then, Lisa, make haste,' they exclaimed. 'Can't you begin? we are all ready.'

'Not all,' said Arthur; 'where's Thorpe? there's Nelly sitting, the model of patience, waiting for him. Where in the world is he gone?'

Nobody knew, but some one suggested he was very likely smoking.

'Then he's in the garden, of course—taken refuge in the green-walk too, most probably. Did you meet with him, Lisa, in the course of your peregrinations?'

Lisa was stooping over some music, and made no reply; and at that moment the door opened, and Mr Thorpe himself walked in. He had been in the library reading, he said, and would have come before if he had known they were going to begin so soon; and he made many apologies to Elinor for his seeming neglect—apologies which were not over when the music struck up and they began to dance.

Lisa's performance that evening was not brilliant; she was very nervous, and her hand was so unsteady that she had some difficulty in turning over the leaves at the right time. But, happily, everybody was too much engrossed with their amusement to think of the music, and except to ask her to play faster or slower, very little was said to her. She went on for more than an hour; and then Mary, coming in, offered to take her place. Arthur seized her at once; but when she was asked afterwards by some one else, she said she was tired and wanted to rest. She stole away, and going into the back drawing-room, sat down by the open window, and resting her head upon her hand, remained for some time listlessly watching the dancers. Two or three parties sauntered in once or twice, finding it cooler than in the other more crowded room; but they came and went without noticing her, and she might have sat for long undisturbed in her retreat in the bay-window, had not some one entered at last with the express purpose of seeking her. It was Mr Thorpe; and although she drew herself as far back as possible, he caught a glimpse

of her dress, and immediately came up to the window. She rose hastily.

‘You are not going?’ he said, rather reproachfully at this sudden movement. ‘Surely you will let me’——

‘No, I can’t; please don’t,’ she exclaimed hurriedly; ‘I really wish to go. Don’t keep me.’ She attempted to pass him, but he had placed himself before her.

‘But, Miss Kennedy, you can’t refuse to hear me—you misunderstood me before; you did not know what I meant, or thought I was not serious, but’——

‘No, Mr Thorpe; I understood you perfectly, and I hoped you understood me too. I hoped you wouldn’t speak to me again about such things, for indeed I don’t like it. I told you I couldn’t listen to you. Won’t you let me go?’ in a voice of entreaty.

There was no reply for a moment, for Cunninghame was perplexed. That he with his handsome face and figure—his baronetcy and some thousands a year in prospective, and who had been run after by young ladies without number—that he should be refused, was a thing incredible; least of all by Lisa Kennedy, who had not a penny in the world, and not even a home of her own. Not that he cared for this; he was his own master, and could marry as he pleased; and although he would have liked it better had her circumstances been somewhat different, yet he was fairly, and for him deeply, in love with the beautiful girl before him; and in the passion of the moment all minor considerations were thrust into the background. She was poor, certainly, very poor; and still little else than a child; singularly simple and unsophisticated in manner, and very young in all her thoughts and ways; but these were faults she would soon lose in intercourse with the world, and her grace and beauty would adorn any rank in which she was placed. And he could give her a position of which she had but little idea; he could offer her wealth and everything else that was worth having. He had done so, indeed, and she had refused them; though he could not believe that she was really serious in rejecting him. She was only shy, or wanted to make the most of her power; and yet what to say more he did not know. He had been most vehement in his declarations of love, and she had turned from him. She had persisted in refusing to listen to him; and had seemed so anxious for him to leave her, that he might almost

have imagined she wished him to take her at her word, had not the supposition been utterly improbable. And even now she would not hear him. But he must bring her to know her own mind before she left him ; and while she was looking all impatience and entreaty to be allowed to go, he still kept his ground.

‘Only for two minutes ; you will not refuse me such a short time as that ? I can’t, I won’t believe you are so indifferent to me as you wish to appear. Forgive my saying it, but your manner to me has been such as to give me encouragement, and I cannot think you have been trifling with me, that you have only raised hopes which you meant to disappoint’——

But that was all Lisa heard. He said a great deal more, but she did not hear it. Her thoughts were all engrossed with trying to recall what she had said and done to give him reason to suppose she cared for him. She certainly had talked to him a great deal, and she wished she had not done so. It was true he had sought her out, but perhaps if she had liked she might have avoided him more ; she might have said less, and have let him see that she did not wish for his company. But she had been too innocent to suspect the construction that might be put upon her words and actions, and was horrified now to think how he had misinterpreted her conduct. Was it really true that she had been trifling with him, that she had actually given him reason to suppose she cared for him ? It was such a dreadful thing to have done ; she felt quite wretched at the bare idea ; and the mute look of distress and perplexity with which she stood regarding him, brought Cunninghame to a stand-still in his speech. He paused, and she started—she felt she must say something.

‘Will you listen to me, Mr Thorpe, please ?’ she said, trying to collect herself and to speak distinctly. ‘If I ever said or did anything to make you believe that—that—I cared for you, I was very wrong. I am not a woman, you know, and I wasn’t thinking of such things, and it never came into my head that you might misunderstand me. I am very sorry,’ she repeated, in the tone of a child making a confession. ‘Won’t you forgive me, and mayn’t I go now ?’

She looked up at him beseechingly, but her eye fell beneath the glance she met, and she coloured deeply.

‘Lisa, you are positively the most bewitching little creature I ever met with. But what makes you so shy and hard to get at ?



Will nothing persuade you to give in, and tell me that you love me ?'

'No, nothing ; for I don't—I don't care for you at all, Mr Thorpe, and I never shall.' She spoke in a low voice, but very decidedly.

He laughed. 'You are very frank ; but if, as you say, you don't care for me now, at least, Lisa, you may'——

'Not Lisa, if you please,' she said, roused to anger at his pertinacity, and at what she considered the liberty he was taking. 'Not Lisa, if you please ; I have never given you leave to call me so. I don't like what you are saying to me, and if you had any proper feeling, you wouldn't go on—you wouldn't keep me here when you know it's disagreeable to me. I can't say anything plainer than I have said, or I would.' And then, seeing that he had inadvertently shifted his position a little, she slipped down suddenly, and before he could stop her she had pushed aside a small table that was in her way, and made her escape into the middle of the room.

In her haste to effect her retreat, however, poor Lisa ran into a danger she had not foreseen, for in brushing past the centre table, she happened to throw down a candle which stood there. It fell upon the floor without being extinguished, and her dress, which was a very thin light muslin, swept across it, and caught fire in a moment. She made an attempt at first to put out the flames by pressing her dress tight down upon them, but this only made them spread ; and becoming alarmed, she started up wildly.

'O Mary, Mary, save me ! Where are you, Mary ?' and with a shriek of frantic terror, she rushed from the room ; the air from the open window playing round her, and fanning the fire high up her skirt.

Her appearance among the dancers caused the greatest consternation, and a cry from all the ladies brought the music to a sudden stop, and created general confusion. Those nearest her fled in alarm, and by their efforts to escape, increased the universal panic, and even the gentlemen seemed to have lost their presence of mind, and looked as if paralysed by the unexpected sight. The poor child thought herself deserted, and confused with terror, and feeling the scorching breath of the flames rising to her face and neck, she turned in despair—though what she meant to do, it would have been hard to say. But a door open-

ing beside her, appeared to suggest some hope of escape, and too much terrified to think, she was on the point of rushing through it, when her progress was stopped by the person who was entering. A strong arm was thrown round her, which held her back, and then the heavy folds of the curtain which hung from the archway were flung over her, and she found herself forced down upon an ottoman that was close by.

‘Sit still, Lisa ; you are safe if you stay where you are ;’ and almost frenzied with terror as she was, the mere sound of that voice reassured her. She did as she was told, and Percy kept his firm hold of her with one hand, while with the other he drew the curtain closer and closer round her burning dress. Some of the other gentlemen had hastened up by this time, and with their assistance he succeeded in extinguishing the flames. Then he released her ; and pale as death, and trembling from head to foot, she sat up—a deplorable figure, but, with the exception of being a little scorched, quite unhurt. The whole thing had been only the affair of a minute ; but quickly as it was all over, so swift had been the progress of the flames, that her escape seemed little else than a miracle. One moment’s more hesitation on the part of any one would have made it too late to save her, if not from a dreadful death, at least from sufferings of which none could think without a shudder. She was too much confused and terrified to be able to think or speak, and could only cling convulsively to Mary, and sob most bitterly ; while Percy stood by, presenting very nearly as deplorable a spectacle as she did, his hair and clothes singed, and having in one respect fared even worse than herself, for his right hand and wrist had been burnt before he succeeded in getting the flames under.

No one, however, knew anything of this. The first panic was over, but there was so much talking, so much crowding round the spot, and so many exclamations from all the ladies as they looked at the crouching, trembling little figure before them, and everybody had so many questions to ask as to how the accident had happened, that nothing else was thought of. But Lisa only cried when asked how she had contrived to set herself on fire ; and when her aunt scolded her for carelessness, she cried still more, but could give no explanations.

‘I couldn’t help it. Mary, please take me away, I am so frightened ;’ and then, happily for her, Dr Tennent came in, and his entrance put an end to the confusion that

prevailed in the room. He did not stop to ask many questions, even putting an end, without much ceremony, to his wife's remarks.

'My dear, it is not the time to be scolding her, whatever she has done. Don't you see the poor child is frightened out of her senses? And calling for a shawl, he wrapped Lisa in it, and carried her off without more ado, Mary following him. He took her to her own room, and there she came to herself, and her hysterical sobbing ceased. But she shuddered so much whenever any allusion was made to what had passed, that Mary thought it best to avoid the subject altogether. She helped her to undress, and sat by her side for a long time, until she fell asleep. But it was a restless, troubled sleep; she kept starting and sobbing, and several times she sat up with a cry of terror, shivering with her fears of fancied danger. Once, too, she cried bitterly.

'It's not my fault, Percy; don't leave me, don't leave me,' she said in imploring accents. 'You don't know how miserable I am.' And then she started up suddenly. 'I was talking, wasn't I, Mary? Did you hear what I said?'

'Something about Percy, I believe. But let me shake up your pillow for you, dear, and then you will be more comfortable. I should like to see you in really a sound sleep.'

Lisa gave a long sigh. 'Yes, I wish I could sleep; I am so tired.' And then, as she lay back once more, 'Mary, he didn't get hurt while he was saving me, did he? I never said one word to him.' She burst into tears.

'My dear Lisa, he didn't expect it. What could you have said at such a time? You will see him to-morrow, and then you can say as much as you like.'

Lisa turned her head away with another very long-drawn sigh. 'And he was not hurt?' she said.

Mary hesitated. 'Only a little; his hand was rather burnt; nothing, though, to make yourself uneasy about,' she added, speaking lightly. 'Indeed, dear Lisa, you must not cry in that way. Percy, of all people, isn't one to think much of a thing like that. What are soldiers fit for if they can't bear a little pain?'

But Lisa's tears came from a mixture of feelings, and of some of them Mary guessed nothing. Tired out at last, however, she sank into a sleep so sound and quiet that her cousin felt she

might safely leave her. Drawing the curtains close, that the daylight which was beginning to dawn might not disturb her, Mary stole quietly away, and shutting the door behind her, retreated to her own room.

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## CHAPTER XV.

‘SOME DAYS MUST BE DARK AND DREARY.’

It was very late the next day when Lisa awoke. The luncheon-bell rang some minutes before she was dressed, and it was some little time before she could summon courage to go down to the dining-room. As she had expected, all eyes were turned upon her as she entered, and looking very guilty, she stopped before she got half way across the room. But Dr Tennent, at the bottom of the table, paused in his carving, and held out his hand.

‘Well, my little girl, and so you are come at last! But what are you standing there for, looking as if you were frightened still?’ and then, as she sprang into his arms, he gave her a long kiss. ‘Don’t you know how glad we are to have you safe, not hurt in the least, eh? Indeed, my child, it is a great mercy; we can’t be too thankful you have had such an escape.’

He kissed her again, and Lisa gave him a great hug. She did not mind anything after that, and could face even her aunt’s grave looks with courage; but when, upon making her way round to her own seat, she passed the window where Percy was standing with some letters in his hand, she stopped again. He looked constrained, and although he held out his hand, and said something about hoping she was quite well, and had got over her fright, his tone was stiff, and his manner altogether different from what it would have been a few days back. The change struck her most painfully; she gave some commonplace answer, and with a quivering lip walked on to her seat. How ungrateful he must think her, was the one thought filling her mind; of

course, he could know nothing of her real feelings, he could not see she was longing to speak, and could not find words to do so. But she would—she would not let this go on any longer—the moment she could she would see him alone and thank him as she wished.

She longed for dinner to be over to find the opportunity she wanted; and the fear lest he might, as he often did, leave the room before they had finished, kept her in a state of suspense which completely took away her appetite. She wished people would eat a little faster and not talk, and, above all, that they would not say so much about what had happened the night before.

But Mrs Tennent, for one, had no intention of leaving the subject alone. She was exceedingly annoyed at the damage that had been done in the drawing-room, and desired to know how it had all happened, as she supposed Lisa must be able by this time to give some account of it. Some one else might have been able to do that, but he was silent, of course; and Lisa's hesitation and extreme embarrassment in relating her story did not tend to remove her aunt's displeasure.

'I must say that it is just such an explanation as I should have expected from you, Lisa. Pray, what were you doing there at all? Why were you not with the others?'

'I was resting; at least, I had been; I was coming away,' Lisa murmured in confusion, which was remarked by every one at the table.

Mrs Tennent looked at her. 'It is very strange, there is something I don't understand. How you managed to be so careless passes my comprehension! You have no consideration at all for other people's feelings; the Dacres were frightened out of their senses last night; and so was everybody else.'

'Herself included,' said Dr Tennent, kindly. 'She was the one to be frightened, if anybody was; you had better let her forget it now if she can.'

'Nonsense, Dr Tennent,' said his wife, angrily. 'Don't make her more careless than she is; she is quite bad enough. When people bring misfortunes on themselves they can't expect much sympathy; it is those who suffer by their carelessness who are to be pitied. Poor Mrs Dacre was terribly alarmed, so was Rose. They were both in hysterics; and several others were almost as bad. We had quite a scene.'

‘Yes, indeed, I can vouch for the truth of that,’ remarked Arthur, with a melancholy shake of his head.

‘It was very careless of you, Lisa,’ continued Mrs Tennent, ignoring the interruption. ‘I hope you know those handsome curtains are quite spoiled?’

‘That was Percy’s doing, my dear,’ said the doctor, drily, at which there was a general laugh; while Arthur remarked again that Percy had not waited, as he ought to have done, to calculate the cost of the curtains. ‘He should have stayed to find an old shawl or blanket that had seen good wear, and was not wanted. By-the-by, I am afraid, Lisa, we can’t congratulate you upon your conduct on the occasion. Don’t you know that to go tearing about as you were doing was the worst thing possible? Why didn’t you sit still till somebody came to help you?’

‘Nonsense, Arthur!’ said Isabel. ‘She ought to have thrown herself on the ground; that is the right thing to do. Running about increases the draught, and makes the flames draw faster. You might have thought of that, Lisa.’

‘I was so frightened,’ Lisa said, in a low voice, ‘I didn’t think of anything.’

‘Ah, well, the case is a proven one,’ said Arthur, in a decided tone. ‘Both you and Percy were wanting in presence of mind. And now the best thing to do will be to get up another exhibition this evening, and Isabel and I will be the performers. What do you say, Isabel? Shall we give the world an opportunity of seeing how such things ought to be managed?’

But here Arthur was called to order by Mrs Tennent, who said she would not allow any joking upon the subject. At which rebuke Arthur made a feint of looking very penitent, and then asked for another slice of mutton.

‘I’ll tell you what, though, Lisa,’ he began again, while he was disposing of it—‘I’ll tell you what, and that is, that you ought to be eternally grateful to Le Balafre; if you did what you ought, you’d tell him so in public. It is my firm opinion you haven’t even given him a civil “thank you.”’

Lisa was silent, but her head was bent, and he could not see her averted face.

‘I don’t understand it,’ he went on. ‘I never was more astonished in my life than to find that you and he know no more of each other than you did when I went away. But you must

give in now; even if you can't come to thinking him good-looking, you must end by liking him. Gratitude alone, if nothing else, will bring you to that.'

There was no reply still from Lisa; but unfortunately for her this speech was overheard by Susan, who was quite ready to make her comments on it. 'I don't think gratitude will make Lisa like Percy,' she remarked, sapiently. 'She always said she didn't like him, and knew she never should. She told me once he was so ugly she couldn't bear to look at him.' And although this communication was not intended for everybody, it was sufficiently audible to be heard by any one who had not their attention otherwise engaged.

'O Susan!' was all that poor Lisa could exclaim, the crimson colour, rushing to her face, and the tears to her eyes.

'Why, Lisa, you said so; you know you did.'

'Susan,' said her mother gravely, 'if Lisa chooses to make rude speeches, there is no need for you to repeat them. Don't let me hear anything more of that sort.' And Susan, abashed, returned to her dinner.

But Lisa could not raise her head again. From one glance she had taken she saw that what had passed had been overheard by Percy, and between shame and wretchedness she felt overwhelmed. That one of her thoughtless, foolish speeches, made so long ago, should have been repeated just when he had done so much for her, was dreadful. Nor was it true. But of course he could not tell that. Perhaps he fancied they were her thoughts still; and in bitter self-reproach Lisa upbraided herself for that and every other idle thing she had ever said of him. She scarcely heard a word of what was going on, and the first thing that roused her was something her uncle was saying. He was looking at his watch.

'Well, Percy, if we want to catch the 2.10 train, we had better be starting.' And he got up.

'Where are they going, Arthur?' she said then.

'Going? To London, of course. At least Percy is. I don't know for what; business of some sort, I believe. He'll be away two or three weeks, I think.'

Two or three weeks! The words fell like lead on Lisa's heart. To be all that time without seeing him, without speaking to him, or hearing him speak! And to let him leave without saying one word, without thanks of any kind!

She sat for a moment or two, silent and very miserable; but little George came trotting into the room, and caught hold of her dress, and that diverted her attention. She took him up in her arms, and as he began to rock himself backwards and forwards with great energy, and call out ‘gee, gee,’ she discovered he had caught a glimpse of the horse and carriage at the hall door, and would like to have a nearer view of them. So she carried him out into the hall that he might look at them through the window, and while she was standing there Percy came out of the dining-room. Whether he had seen her was not certain, but he came up to the window where she was, and Georgie in great delight stretched out his arms to go to him. He, at least, was too young to mind plain looks in those who would play with and amuse him; and his tall grave brother had long since won his heart as only one who was naturally fond of children could do.

‘No, my little man. I can’t take you to-day. I haven’t time; we must wait till I come back.’ He stooped to kiss the child. ‘Good-bye, Lisa,’ and he held out his hand to her.

There was no resentment in look or voice—no trace even of annoyance—at what had in truth cut him to the heart. For, plain as he knew himself to be, it was one thing to recognise this as a fact, to which he could, as a sensible man, be perfectly indifferent, and quite another to find that it came between him and the being whom he idolised. For if ever man loved woman, he loved Lisa Kennedy—with all the passionate energy with which natures that are supposed to be cold so often love; and it was a bitter, wringing disappointment to find that the hope which he had cherished of pleasing her was over now—quite over and gone. He was not the one to win her; some one else must do so—some one handsomer, gayer, more like her own bright self—Cunninghame Thorpe, perhaps. And he did not blame her that she preferred another to himself; but still it was very hard to give her up; and far down in the bottom of his heart there was an aching, writhing sense of disappointed hopes, and many wounded and bitter feelings. There was little sign, however, to tell of what was passing in his mind; only his voice was not quite steady as he said good-bye. But Lisa was too much agitated to notice this; when she tried to speak she could not; and yet the opportunity she had wished for was going, and she had not used it.

‘Good-bye’ was all she could say in answer; and he turned



away. And then, with the sense that he was really going, her faltering resolution returned.

'Percy!' Her voice was very low, but he looked round, and seeing her eyes fixed upon him came back to the window.

'You called me, Lisa, didn't you? Do you want anything?' But at that moment Mr Thorpe made his appearance in the hall, and the time for explanation was gone.

'No, thank you, nothing.' And she hid her face on Georgie's curly head that her tears might not be seen. Dr Tennent came out, and the next minute they were gone. The carriage turned the corner of the street and they were out of sight. Carrying her charge back to the dining-room, Lisa set him down among the others, and slipping through the library to avoid Mr Thorpe, who she knew was lying in wait for her where she had left him, ran up the back stairs and flew to her own room, where, throwing herself on her bed, she gave way to a passionate burst of grief.

It was all over, and he was gone, gone without a word from her; and it seemed as if with him all the sunshine of her life had gone too. It mattered little that in three weeks' time he would be back—she lived only in the present, and everything was a blank now. And by-and-by it would be worse, for he would be going, not for a few weeks only, but for very long; perhaps with years between each visit. She might be away, and never, never meet him; and the dull aching sense of wretchedness in poor Lisa's heart grew deeper at the thought—too deep at last for tears.

And he knew nothing of it all. He was journeying to London on that hot summer's day, little dreaming that while he sat musing sadly over his shattered hopes, she was shedding bitter tears in her silent room, and that in her inmost heart the long yearning cry always going up was, 'O Percy! Percy! if you would only come back; and if I could only make things as they were a little time ago. I was so happy then!'

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## CHAPTER XVI.

## BAFFLED.

THE first change that took place after Percy left was Mr Thorpe's departure. He had made himself so generally agreeable that his going was a source of regret to nearly every one. Not to Lisa, however. She was quite tired of trying to avoid him, and of inventing pretexts for being engaged with something else whenever he made his appearance; and it was an intense relief to her to think he was really going.

She had hard work, however, the last day, to keep out of his way, so determined was he to make the opportunity he was seeking, and oblige her to listen to him once more; but bent as he was upon this, she was equally bent upon not hearing him. He did not get a glimpse of her all the morning; but after luncheon she was sent into the garden by her aunt to gather some flowers for the dinner-table that evening. It was an opportunity too good to be lost; and when Mrs Tennent and Elinor, whom he had promised to attend on some shopping expedition, went upstairs to put on their bonnets, he walked out after Lisa, who was very busy among the flower-beds.

She pretended at first not to see him, and went flitting about here and there in all directions, contriving to lead him a dance all round the garden before he could come up with her; and when he did overtake her, she discovered suddenly that the roses were pricking her fingers, and remembered she had left her gloves in the house. He wanted to be allowed to cut the flowers for her, and when she declined this, offered to fetch the gloves if she would tell him where they were to be found; an offer which was perfectly useless, for when did Lisa ever know where anything of hers was to be found? She had not an idea now; and as she said so, began to walk away.

'Can't you give me two minutes, Miss Kennedy? I have been wishing all day to speak to you. You are in no hurry, are you?'

'Yes, I am. The sun is very hot, and I want to finish. I can't stay.' And off she went, leaving her basket and flowers

upon the ground. But although he mounted guard diligently over these for more than a quarter of an hour, she did not return ; and Mrs Tennent and Elinor being ready then for their walk, he was obliged to leave the place, having the satisfaction of seeing Lisa and Prince come out by one door as he went in at another.

When he went into the drawing-room after dinner that evening, he found her sitting at one of the windows on a low stool, playing at draughts with Constance, but so much taken up with her game that she did not notice his entrance. Nor could he get near her, there being several ladies present, to whom he was obliged to give his attention, and Lisa, not being 'introduced,' kept in the background. He considered it an especial bore to have to devote himself to the Miss Frasers, and do duty at the piano half the evening, while all he could see of Lisa was an occasional glimpse when some one happened to move, or perhaps the fluttering of her dress as she passed across the room.

A very simple white dress it was, of the commonest description, but she somehow attracted every one's attention ; and her aunt remarked in grave silence the beautiful plaits at the back of her head, and the scarlet geranium which with two or three green leaves she had placed in her waist-band. Later in the evening, when she was going to the piano to take part in some duet, Cunninghame, who had been admiring her every time he could catch sight of her, and had arrived at the conclusion that a white dress with just that little bit of colour about it was the very prettiest thing any lady could wear, overheard a peremptory command to her from Mrs Tennent to 'throw away those flowers.'

'Take them out directly, Lisa, and don't ornament yourself again like that. I dislike exceedingly to see you thinking so much of your dress. Throw them away, and don't be so silly again, if you please.'

There was a flash in Lisa's eyes at this speech ; but she took the flower and the leaves from her belt, and tossing them on the floor, walked on to the piano. She did not see that Cunninghame picked them up as they fell, and when he stood by their side while she and Elinor were playing their duet, she kept her eyes fixed upon her music, and resolutely declined giving him any of her attention. When they had finished, and she rose to go, he stopped her to ask for some favourite piece of his.

‘No, I am tired,’ she said, and away she walked. He could not get near her again till she was leaving the room for the night, when he happened to be standing near the door, and stepped forward to open it for her. She turned to him then very gravely.

‘Good-bye, Mr Thorpe. I hope you will have a pleasant journey to-morrow.’

It was provoking that some one should call him just then, for he had planted himself there on purpose, intending to follow her, and now this interruption detained him. It was only for a moment, but it was quite enough to give her the start of him, and when he got into the hall it was empty. He could only see a glimpse of something white vanishing at the top of the stairs, and hear a door close in the distance. The sound elicited some exclamation more expressive than polite from him, and for a few minutes he stood still, as if not quite realising the fact that he had been so completely baffled, and by such a child, too!

The next day he left Atherstone with Ralph and Janet, who were also returning to Gainsford; and when Lisa knew he was gone, she celebrated the event by an impromptu little dance, got up for her own edification and that of Prince, who sat on his hind legs and watched her with his bright eyes twinkling inquiringly through his shaggy hair. He was evidently puzzled to account for her delight, and quite as much so to know why, in the midst of her dance, she stopped short suddenly and, sitting down on the floor, covered him with kisses. His rough coat was very wet afterwards, and when some one came into the room, she got up in a great hurry and ran away.

A few days after Mr Thorpe left, it was arranged that Lisa, with Lane and the younger children, should be sent to Copelands for a few days. The weather that summer was unusually close and hot, even for August, and there was not much fresh air to be had at the Priory. Mrs Pye would take them in, as she had often done on similar occasions; and they would all of them be the better for a little run in the country, especially Lisa, who was not so well as usual, and was looking pale and listless. And Dr Tennent, when he settled this, patted his niece on the head, and told her ‘she would like that—she was very fond of Mrs Pye, he knew—and a visit to Copelands would be a treat to her.’ And Lisa did not say ‘No.’ When he was so kind it would have seemed ungrateful to tell him she did not want to

go. And yet that was the truth, for in two days Percy was to be at home again. Mary had heard that very morning that he meant to come back on Thursday, and this was Tuesday; and although she was not sure whether she most wished or dreaded to see him, she was quite certain she did not wish to be away at Copelands just when he was coming back.

But she could not say so; and that evening she and Mary walked over to see Mrs Pye, and settle all things for their going. There was a lurking hope in her mind all the way out, that for some reason or other the arrangement might not be practicable; but this hope was disappointed. Mrs Pye was delighted at the idea of having them, and promised to take the greatest care of Miss Lisa, whose pale face excited her deepest commiseration. Not that Lisa was pale when these remarks were made, for they brought the colour into her cheeks, and she disliked them so much that she ran away into the farmyard to escape such unwelcome pity, and did not emerge from it until Mary was ready to return.

‘Which day are we to go?’ was her first question then when they had left the house.

‘On Thursday, dear. Mrs Pye would have had you to-morrow; but I knew Lane would be busy, so I settled the day after. You are to go the first thing after breakfast.’

Thursday! the very day he was to come.

She said nothing, but it seemed as if Mary must have guessed what was passing in her mind, for she added—

‘You will be sorry to miss Percy when he comes back. But you will see him soon, I daresay; he is sure to get over to Copelands when he hears you are there.’

Lisa’s reply to this was not very intelligible, and all the way home she hardly said a word, but paced wearily by her cousin’s side along the dusty road, as if she had no spirit for talking. And yet it was a very pleasant evening, just such a one as she enjoyed in general. The sun had gone down some time before in a sea of purple and gold, and in the western sky there were still traces of the glow he had left behind, but the twilight was coming on and the dew was beginning to fall. The air was fresh and moist, and laden with the scent of honeysuckles and traveller’s joy, and the hedges were ringing with the wild, cheery chirp of countless grasshoppers. It was just what she would have liked any other evening, but she did not care for it now; and she lagged

on with such evident signs of fatigue, that Mary, though longing to hasten her steps, restrained them out of pity to her. It was getting quite dark when they reached the Priory; so dark, that when they went in, Lisa, who was first, ran against some one in the hall. She looked up in surprise, and could just make out a very tall dark figure in the dim light. Dim as it was, it was enough to enable her to recognise the form.

‘Why, Percy!’ she exclaimed; and in the strange flutter of surprise and joy that came over her, her voice hardly sounded natural. Perhaps he thought he had startled her.

‘Is that you, Lisa? I didn’t see you coming. I hope I didn’t frighten you.’

‘Oh, no, not at all;’ and then, as Mary hastened up with exclamations of astonishment and pleasure, she passed on into the drawing-room without saying any more. She had meant to meet him naturally; ever since he went, she had been settling what she should say and do when she saw him again; and she had intended to be as like her old self as possible. But somehow this beginning was not successful—she would not at any other time have walked away without waiting to ask what had brought him back sooner than he expected; and when it was too late she was vexed with herself for having done so. She stood by the table round which all the others were gathered talking, angry with herself for being so stupid, and yet unable to summon up courage to speak even a few words to him. Arthur, by whose side she was standing, presently turned to her with a smile—

‘Will you like to be introduced to a new acquaintance, Lisa? Some one you have never seen before. Let me have the pleasure of introducing him? Major Tennent, you were inquiring for Miss Kennedy just now, and when you heard she was exploring the roads between here and Copelands under the protection only of a female relative, you seemed to have serious fears for her safety. I am happy to tell you they were without foundation, for she has escaped the highwaymen and gipsies supposed to infest this part of the country, and is ready now to make your acquaintance. Allow me, therefore——’ A grand flourish followed.

Lisa looked bewildered.

‘Major Tennent!’

‘Yes, Major Tennent. Major Tennent, Royal Engineers. My

dear Lisa, I hope you don't generally look so "daft" when you are introduced to people. Is there anything so extraordinary in his having got his majority?'

Lisa coloured. 'I didn't know he had,' she said, in a low voice.

'Of course not; he didn't know it himself till yesterday. But now that you do know it, where are your congratulations? Don't you think he deserves his honours? It looks like it, as you can't tell him you are glad he has got them.'

'I *am* glad, though—*very* glad,' Lisa murmured; and although the words were not addressed to Percy, he heard them.

'Thank you, Lisa;' and his manner was so like old times, that for a moment she forgot everything but the pleasure of hearing his voice again, and looked up with a smile. And then she shrank away vexed with herself, that she could not meet his eye without colouring. How silly it was of her to be so stupid and conscious! Was she never to be able to meet him like any one else? never to hear him speak without her cheek flushing, and her heart throbbing? And she had meant to be natural, to show no change at all in her manner to him.

'A good beginning this, certainly,' thought poor Lisa, as she felt her burning face, and found how unsteady her hand was when she tried to work that evening. 'It's fortunate for me I'm going to Copelands, and no one will see me there; but oh, how I wish that Janet had never said that! How I wish I were a child still, and had never had such thoughts! I was happy before they came, and now I'm not! I'm miserable!'

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## CHAPTER XVII.

## UNDER THE LIME-TREES.

‘AND you won’t come out then, Mary?’

‘No, dear, I don’t think I can. I will come to you if I have time before tea; you will be in the green-walk, I suppose?’

‘Yes, I am going to take my work there;’ and Lisa closed the door of her cousin’s room and went down-stairs.

There had been a thunderstorm the night before, which had cleared the air, and the day was bright and breezy. White fleecy clouds were drifting over the blue sky, borne across by the summer wind; and sunlight and shade played by turns on tree and shrub and lawn. Very beautiful it all looked, but Lisa must have had her thoughts engaged, for she hardly glanced around, as with head bent down, and slow and thoughtful footsteps, she made her way into the green-walk.

She had sauntered almost to the end without once raising her eyes, and might have returned in the same way had not a short bark from her dog made her look up; and then, to her no little embarrassment, she discovered that she had come upon her cousin Percy, who was stretched upon one of the long garden benches in the walk. He was as unaware of her presence as she had been of his, and as he had his back to her, and his hat drawn over his eyes, she might have escaped unobserved, had not Prince attracted his attention by jumping upon him. He raised his hat, and seeing Lisa standing there with a deep blush upon her face, uncertain whether to go or stay, he got up, looking for the moment almost as much embarrassed as she did. She was the first to recover herself, and to break the awkward silence.

‘What a shame of us to disturb you!’ she said; ‘but I didn’t know you were here. I am very sorry.’

‘You didn’t disturb me. Don’t let me drive you away, Lisa; I am not going to stay;’ and he took up a book that was lying on the bench. ‘You were coming to sit here, were you not?’

And thinking she would rather be alone, he began to walk away.

‘Are you obliged to go?’ she said, timidly.



‘Not if you wish me to stay, Lisa,’ and he turned back eagerly. ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’

‘No, it’s not that.’ She hesitated, and after two or three attempts to speak, burst into tears. ‘Percy, I don’t know what you must have thought of me all this time. You know what you did for me, and I have never yet said a word of thanks to you. You must have thought me so ungrateful.’ Her voice was unsteady, and she could not go on.

‘Ungrateful! No, never, Lisa! Who could think such a thing of you?’ he said, with a long wistful glance at her tearful and half-averted face. ‘I wanted no thanks. It was happiness enough for me to know you were safe—that I had saved you. I did not want anything else.’ It was said hurriedly, but the low, earnest voice made Lisa tremble.

‘I have been very silly, silly in a great many things lately,’ she said, colouring a good deal, and with the tears still in her eyes; ‘but I do thank you, Percy, and much, much more than I can tell you: I shall never forget it as long as I live. I wish you could know all I feel about it.’

He smiled. ‘What else could I have done, Lisa? you did not expect me to stand by and see you burnt to death without trying to help you? No man in the world would have done such a thing.’

‘Perhaps not. I don’t know. Nobody did help me,’ said Lisa, with a shudder at the recollection of those terrible moments. ‘They might have done so afterwards, but then it would have been too late. You were the only person, Percy, who did what you could directly. You may say what you like, but I shall think of it as long as I live, and I shall always feel I can never thank you half enough. And you don’t know how sorry I am about that.’ She looked at his hand as she spoke.

He looked at it too, and smiled again.

‘It’s not worth being sorry for, Lisa; I can use it again nearly as well as ever, you see.’ And then, as if he thought that enough had been said upon the subject, he added, rather abruptly, ‘And that was all you wanted me for?’

‘Yes. I couldn’t go away and let you go on thinking me ungrateful; and we are going to Copelands to-morrow, you know.’

‘Yes, so Mary told me; she says you have not been well

lately. I hope the change will do you good, Lisa ; I am sure you want it.' There was not much in the words, but a great deal in the tone. Lisa sat down on the bench, and took out her work to hide her agitation, remarking at the same time that she didn't think there was much the matter with her, only the hot weather had made her head ache. Percy, who seemed to be making up his mind to say something, stood by her for a few moments in silence.

'I am afraid we shall not see much more of each other, he began at last with evident effort. 'You go to Copelands to-morrow, and I shall only be here a day or two longer myself. I am leaving on Saturday.'

'Leaving!' The work fell from her hands, and she looked up with a white face.

'Yes, I am going to Scotland ; and I shall be away two or three months, most likely as long as my leave lasts. I don't think I shall return here.'

There was a long silence ; Lisa's head was bent over her work again, and she made no reply. Perhaps he had hoped to hear her express some regret that he was going. A short time ago she would have done so, but now she was silent ; the open, warm-hearted Lisa whom he had known so short a time back was changed, and her apparent indifference cut him to the heart. After a pause of some minutes he went on—

'The last few months have been very happy, so happy that I am afraid I was beginning to care too much for my home ; and that does not do for a soldier ; he has no business to care for one place more than another, so it is quite as well I should be going.'

No answer still from Lisa. Her head was bent lower and lower, but she made no attempt to speak.

'I shall always think of you,' he added ; 'and wherever you are, or whatever you are doing, I hope I shall always hear you are happy. And, Lisa, can we not say good-bye as friends ? Something has come between us lately ; but whatever it has been, can we not forget it now, and make the most of this last day ? It may be very long before we have another together.'

Poor Lisa ! With those last words her hard-fought struggle came to an end, and she burst into a flood of such bitter weeping that Percy was startled, though he was far from conjecturing the true cause of her distress. To all his entreaties

to tell him what was distressing her she only answered, 'It was not his fault; she was foolish, that was all.'

'That is all! but, Lisa, I must surely have said something. You would not be in such distress if nothing were the matter. What is it? Won't you tell me?' And then, as she was still silent, a new light broke in upon him. He sat for some moments doubtful and irresolute, but at last he said—

'Lisa, can it really be anything to you whether I go or stay? Is it that is making you unhappy?'

He was trembling between hope and fear; but even then she could give no answer. Although her face was turned away, he could see she was crying again most bitterly.

'If I thought you wished me to stay, Lisa, I would not go,' he said, even then scarcely daring to hope.

'You wouldn't go?' And she raised her head and for a moment looked at him with a child's face of eagerness and joy, but the next she turned away again with deepening colour.

'No; not if you wished me to stay. Lisa, I will tell you the truth. It was only on your account I was going—because I love you so much that I could not stay where I thought there was no chance of winning your love in return; but if I thought there was'—— He looked at her, but she neither moved nor spoke. 'Lisa, I have loved you ever since I first saw you; and I have loved you almost without hope, for I felt what a difference there was between us, in age and character and everything else, and thought it was madness to ask you to think of me as anything but a cousin and a friend. Whether I have any right to ask it now I don't know. Lisa, dear Lisa, will you tell me? Will you say whether I may stay, and hope that some day you may be able to love me as much as I love you?'

Lisa was looking another way, her face all hot and burning; she seemed struggling to speak, though it was long before words came. At last she turned and looked up at him through her tears.

'I can't help it; you are not like anybody else. O Percy, don't go away and leave me!' And child-like in her love and confidence, she hid her face on his arm as if sure of finding there the shelter and protection she wanted.

An hour later they were still sitting in the same place, but Lisa's tears were gone then. Her face was flushed indeed, but it was with happiness. In that short time a change seemed to

her to have come over everything, and the whole world looked radiant. The sunshine, which when she had come that way had seemed so dim, now danced and flickered through the leaves and fell at her feet in a shower of beauty ; and the voice of the summer wind, which not long ago had sounded full of sadness, came laden with a music of its own, and spoke of one lasting dream of happiness. She had found some one who was to be everything to her—some one who would care for her and love her all through her life, and shield her from all trouble and sorrow.

Poor Lisa, it was a bright dream, and it would have been hard, then, to persuade her that it might not last ; that human affection, strong and tried as it might be, could not be all in all to her, that its very intensity and devotion might be the channels through which grief and trial were to visit her. She was too young to have any such misgivings ; and she was very happy sitting there by Percy's side, listening to all he had to tell her of his deep, passionate love, and the bright future he would make for her. She had much, too, to tell him in return ; and though it only came out in bits and snatches, as if she hardly liked to think of what had made her so miserable, yet she managed by degrees to tell him everything—how and when she had first discovered he was not the brother she had always taken him for ; how she had dreaded his knowing what her feelings were ; and how, in trying to hide them, she had contrived to make both herself and him very unhappy. She could not bear to think of it, those last four weeks had been so wretched. But, as he said, why should they make themselves miserable about the past when their mistake had come to an end, and they had found out what they were to each other ? His own happiness, however, he hardly seemed able to realise. That Lisa, bright, joyous, and beautiful, so unlike himself in every way, should have given her affections to him, appeared incredible.

‘Are you sure, dearest, you know what you are doing ? I am afraid you have not thought enough about it, and of the great difference there is between us in everything. You forget how old and grave I am ; and then, too,’ smiling a little, ‘I am not good-looking ; are you sure you can put up with me as I am ? You must have forgotten that’——

‘Percy, that isn't generous of you !’ Lisa exclaimed, growing crimson in a moment. ‘It was so very, very long ago I said that. It was in my foolish days, before I knew or cared about you.

I had forgotten it till Susan reminded me of it that day at dinner ; and then I was miserable. You would never talk in that way if you knew how unhappy it makes me.'

'Well, I will not, dearest ; though I don't know why it should make you unhappy. But, Lisa, what I fear is that you should some day find you have made a mistake in thinking you can care for me. You are so young, so pretty, and so winning, that I feel as if you were not made for me ; only my love for you is as true and deep as any you could find ; you might go all the world over and not meet one who would love you as I do ; and if that would make up for other things'——

'Percy,' and Lisa sat up and looked at him with a bright colour, but with clear steady eyes, 'will you listen to me for one minute ? I want to tell you something, and you are to believe it. I wouldn't have you different if I could. I like your being older and graver than I am, because I like to look up to you. And as for your not being handsome, that is as people think ; I think you are. Won't you believe me ? It is all true, indeed. Promise me you will never talk in that way any more.'

She laid her hand in his, her earnest, wistful look saying even more than her words, and Percy's last doubts went then. Lisa saw he believed and trusted her, and she was very happy. She seemed to have forgotten everything in the joy of that hour, and was quite unconscious of the lapse of time, till the sound of footsteps coming up to a gate close by brought her back to outward realities. The step was her uncle's ; but although she knew this well enough, she started as she heard the turning of the key in the door.

'It's only my father ; you are not going to run away ?' Percy exclaimed, as she made a frightened movement.

'Yes, I am ; I can't see him. O Percy, don't hold me so tight ;' and she was on the point of making her escape when the door opened, and she found herself stopped by Dr Tennent, who caught her as she was passing him.

'Well, my little girl, what are you doing ?' he began, 'and where are you running so fast ? You look as if'—— And then seeing Percy, he stopped short, with a long look first at him, and again at Lisa, whose tell-tale face of blushes and confusion must have prepared him for what was coming.

'Why, Percy, what is the meaning of this ?' and although there was nothing in his tone to indicate displeasure, Lisa felt

that she could not wait to hear the explanation that must be given.

‘Please let me go, uncle Henry, won’t you?’ she said, in such imploring accents that they were not to be resisted.

He looked at her once more with an odd smile, and then released her.

‘I understand. Get along with you. And now, Percy, let me hear what you have to say.’

And as he turned to his son, Lisa made her escape in good earnest, and rushed back to the house.

It was not long afterwards when Mary, who was still sitting in her room, heard the door open very softly, and some one come stealing in. Noiseless as the step was that crossed the floor, she recognised it at once; there was no other like it in the house—no other so light and fairy-like.

‘I am glad you are come, Lisa,’ she said, without looking up; ‘I was not able to get out, for this has taken longer than I thought it would. It must be past tea-time—will you ring the bell, dear?’

Lisa hesitated for a moment, and then, instead of doing as she was asked, came up behind her cousin’s chair, and stood there without speaking. A little surprised, Mary turned.

‘Why, Lisa dear,’ catching a glimpse of her face, ‘how hot you are! Where have you been?’

‘Only in the garden—in the green-walk.’

‘In the garden! But what have you been doing there? Is anything the matter?’

‘No, oh no! It’s only that—that——’ and coming round, and kneeling down by her cousin’s side, she hid her face in her lap. ‘Mary, dear, I was with Percy, and—and he told me something. Can you guess what it was?’

For a moment Mary was silent; then she bent down, stroking Lisa’s hair caressingly.

‘What was it, my darling? I can guess what he said to you, but I don’t know what you told him.’

Lisa raised her head and looked up for a minute very shyly. ‘Not know! O Mary! when he is better than anybody else in all the world—when there is no one like him!’

She hid her face again, but Mary’s warm, delighted embrace was sympathy itself.

‘Dear Lisa, I am so glad—so happy!’

'So am I,' Lisa murmured. 'I am afraid I am too happy. It hardly seems right I should be so, when I have been so silly all this time, and so cross.'

Mary smiled a little.

'That was it, was it, Lisa? That is what has been making you look so pale lately. I thought there was something the matter besides the hot weather.'

'Did you?' Lisa said, in some confusion. 'I didn't know I showed it. I meant to keep it to myself. I was so afraid he should find out that—that—I couldn't tell, you know, that he would ever think of me.'

'Couldn't you?' Well, it is all over now, dear, at any rate, and you need not trouble yourself about it again. You will be very happy, my darling—I am sure Percy will make you so; and I am so glad to know it! And, Lisa, you know what I think of him. You don't want me to tell you what you have heard so often.'

'No, I know it all. I know it's true. And, Mary dear, I must make him happy too. I wonder whether I shall—I'm half afraid. I'm such a little thing, and I don't know much. Suppose he should be disappointed in me after all!'

'Not much fear of that, dearest—he is not taking you on trust. You have known each other so long now. Besides, Lisa, you are very young—you may go on improving.'

'Yes, so I may—I'll try, Mary,' was the answer, in a very thoughtful tone; and with her head still resting on her cousin's knee, Lisa fell into a long reverie.

'And so, Miss Lisa,' began her uncle, when some time afterwards he sent for her into the library—'and so Percy has been persuading you that he is the best person in the world to have the care of you—that you will be much happier with him than you are here. Is it true?' He put his arm round her as she stood by the side of his chair, and drew her very close to him. 'You must tell me what you think about it, my child. Is it really what you wish?'

Lisa nestled still closer to him, and stole a curiously wistful, timid glance at Percy, who was standing near.

'I shall not like leaving you, uncle Henry;' and her voice faltered a little. 'You have always been so kind to me—but—he asked me, and I couldn't say what wasn't true, and'—— She hid her face.

Dr Tennent smiled. 'Which means, I suppose, that you think as he does, and are quite ready to trust yourself to him. So there is nothing left for me to do but to tell him he may have you. Mind, Percy, you take good care of her; for if you don't I shall never forgive you.'

What Percy's answer was no one knew. It was not coherent by any means; but Lisa's confiding smile told that she could trust him; and her face all that evening was one of very quiet, but perfect happiness. She had not even a misgiving as to how her engagement would be taken by the aunt of whom she stood so much in dread. She rested satisfied with the feeling that it was sanctioned and approved by those whom she most loved and cared for.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HAPPY DAYS.

MRS TENNENT'S air of displeasure the following morning was sufficient to make it apparent that something was wrong. But Lisa was too happy to be influenced by external circumstances; and although aware of her aunt's annoyance, it had no power to cast a shadow over the brightness of her spirit. She was very silent; but it was no fear that kept her so—only a strange mixture of shy but very happy feelings. But quietly as she sat in her usual corner, hardly joining at all in what went on, there was no mistaking the radiant expression of her face; and it shortly elicited the remark from Arthur, that 'the mere prospect of Copelands pleasures and Mrs Pye's good cheer seemed to be exhilarating; for Lisa was getting quite "perky" already—unless, indeed, she had been shamming illness to get a holiday.'

Lisa laughed, but it was in some confusion, which was not diminished a minute afterwards, when something being said about Percy's leaving on the Saturday, he answered that he was not going to Scotland at all.



‘Not going to Scotland!’ exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once, while Mrs Tennent looked sterner than ever, and the doctor buried himself behind the *Times*. Lisa’s crimson face escaped notice in the excitement produced by what appeared such an extraordinary announcement.

‘Not going to Scotland!’ repeated Arthur. ‘What’s the meaning of that? I thought it was a settled thing. You don’t mean to say you give up the grouse! It’s a moral impossibility!’

‘And what will the Wilsons say?’ remarked Isabel. ‘They won’t like it—it is so odd to make an engagement and break it without any cause.’

‘I only made it to suit myself,’ he answered, ‘and now I’ve changed my mind. I don’t care to go.’

‘But that is such a foolish reason—they will be offended, you may be sure.’

‘Not the least fear of it. I wrote to Wilson last night.’

‘But the grouse!’ interposed Arthur. ‘What a chance, and to let it go begging! By George, if I could be off to the moors with a gun on my shoulder, you wouldn’t see me back in a hurry. I don’t understand what attraction you have found in Atherstone to keep you here—unless indeed’—— and struck apparently by some bright thought, Arthur looked at his cousin with a peculiar smile. ‘It’s not a settled thing yet, is it? Well, she’s not a bad-looking girl—I rather admire your taste, do you know. Is it fixed, or will congratulations be premature?’

‘Rather; considering that I don’t know whom you are talking about. Susan, what time are you going to Copelands? I shall walk over there with you.’ And as Percy rose from the table, the rest of the party began to break up too, and dispersed to their several occupations.

The walk to Copelands had to be accomplished before the heat of the day came on, so no time was to be lost in setting off; and Lisa, who was ready long before the others, willingly acceded to Percy’s proposal of going on by themselves. They walked silently enough through the long street in which the Priory stood; but when they got beyond the town, he turned to her with a smile, and drew her arm within his. The walk seemed a very short one; but it was only to be the first of many others while she was at Copelands, for he should come over every day, he said—

and before he left he gave her a very pretty pearl ring which he told her he wanted her to wear.

She had never had such a thing before, and she coloured between surprise and delight. 'What a little beauty! But'—and she looked at it doubtfully. 'Did you get it on purpose for me, Percy?'

'Yes, dearest, I did. Why, don't you wish to have it?'

'Oh, yes, it's not that—but—I have never worn anything of the sort, you know. I am not sure whether Aunt Helen will like it. She won't even let me have a brooch to fasten my handkerchief, and I don't know what she will say to a ring!'

He smiled. 'My dear Lisa, she can't treat you as a child any longer. She won't say anything when she hears I have given it to you. And I wish you particularly to wear it. Won't you do so to please me?'

'Of course I will, if you wish it,' she said, slipping it on her finger. 'And I won't lose it. That is a grand promise for me to make, Percy, because I always lose everything. But this will be different, because you have given it me. I shall take great care of it.'

And if that day were to be taken as a sample of what others were to be, Lisa stood in no danger of losing her ring through forgetfulness; for long after Percy had left her, she stood turning it round and round upon her finger, lost in thought. It must have been very pleasant thought, for there was a smile upon her face all the time; and whenever she looked at it afterwards, which was very often, the smile came back. She did not take it off even when she went to bed that night; and once when she half woke up, wondering where she was, she felt to see that it was really there, and assure herself that her happiness was not a dream.

They were pleasant days that followed. The early rising, the visits to the farmyard and dairy, where she helped to milk the cows, skim the cream, and churn the butter, the races in the meadows with Susan and Constance, and the coming back to breakfast so hungry that Mrs Pye's table, laden as it was, seemed hardly furnished with enough to satisfy their appetites; the hundred other employments in orchard, farm, and garden, were more charming now than they had ever been; for through all was the thought of the one great happiness which was so new to her. That thought was with her all day long, brightening the

hours when Percy was away from her, and making those she spent with him the most joyous she had ever known.

He was very often there—every morning, in short—coming over immediately after breakfast to find Lisa on the look-out for him, walking up and down the lane by which he must come, and always meeting him with the most winning smile, and making no attempt to conceal the pleasure which it gave her to be with him. And then came long talks and long rides together; for, remembering her delight in this latter exercise, one of his first thoughts had been to find means for gratifying it; and as Mr Pye had exchanged his hunter for a quieter horse, of which he was most willing to let Miss Lisa have the use, Percy had not much difficulty in carrying out his wishes. A horse for himself was always procurable at Atherstone, and a lady's saddle having also been obtained, and a skirt furnished by Lane to do duty as a habit, Lisa took her first legitimate ride; and although she found a saddle, as she said, the most inconvenient thing imaginable, and declared she would much rather ride without one, she grew accustomed to it in a day or two; and from having had so much stolen practice, soon became an accomplished horse-woman. Their rides grew longer and longer, extending into parts of the country where she had never been before, over lonely heaths, through deep woods and overhanging lanes, and up among the hills, on which she had often looked as the boundary of Atherstone view. She was never tired—only becoming brighter and more animated with every new scene; and as she cantered by Percy's side with eyes sparkling and colour raised, it was no wonder his eye so often lingered on her with admiration; and although his words were few, and his manner singularly quiet and undemonstrative, no one would have been surprised to hear that his love for her was something bordering on idolatry.

'I think these rides are so very pleasant!' she exclaimed one day, 'and certainly this is the most delightful time in all my life. O Percy, what a view! Put up your glass and look at it. Do you see the sunlight on that glimpse of the river below, and those deep shadows on the rocks opposite? How lovely it is, and how beautiful the heather looks!'

They had paused under a clump of trees upon the brow of a hill, and were looking down upon one of the lonely picturesque valleys not uncommon in those parts. It was long before Lisa could take her eyes from the scene before her, and she seemed

so absorbed in its beauty, that she grew quite grave and thoughtful, as if oppressed by the loveliness that lay around. But when they moved on, she began again in her usual tone.

'Yes, I like these rides so much ; they are one of the greatest pleasures I could have. I am so glad to see these new and beautiful places ; and then, too, I am so fond of a horse. Percy,' turning to him with a laugh, 'do you remember my last ride in the spring? How badly I behaved then ! Do you recollect how rude I was to you? I hit you with my whip. I have often thought of it since. I hope I didn't hurt you.'

He smiled a little. 'Your hand is not very heavy, Lisa. If you had been no more hurt than I was, it would have been a good thing for both of us.'

'For me, you mean ; but it was only what I deserved,' she said, very decidedly. 'What a disagreeable girl you must have thought me ! I can't imagine how it was you didn't hate me, and give me up as good for nothing.'

'Instead of liking you all the better for it. I am afraid, Lisa, your wilfulness and your—your what shall I call it'——

'Bad, spiteful temper?' suggested Lisa, patting her horse's neck.

'Nothing of the sort ; your—well, your dislike of me, for I suppose it came from that—I am afraid that was the very thing which attracted me. I don't think I should have cared for you half so much if you had not been what you were.'

Lisa opened her eyes. 'You liked me for being naughty, you mean—for being self-willed, disobedient, and unamiable? O Percy !'

'It was not right, perhaps, but I am afraid it is the truth. I don't know that I always approved of what you did ; but I liked it, as coming from you. And it is the case still. You may do what you please, Lisa. You can do nothing I should not like.'

'Nothing !' and Lisa smiled a little. 'But, Percy, that is very wrong of you. If I don't do right, you ought to tell me of it, and help me to be better. I have so many faults, that if I haven't some one to remind me of them, I shall never get rid of them. And if you say you would like anything I do, you will never help me at all, I am afraid. Only I don't quite believe that.' She rode on in silence for a short distance, and then said suddenly, with a sparkle of suppressed merriment in her eyes,

‘If I were to tell you by-and-by I didn’t care for you, I suppose you would like that too.’

‘Lisa!’ His voice was so terribly hoarse and unnatural that she was quite startled; and when she turned to look at him, there was a cloud upon his face such as she had never seen before. In something like fear she shrank away. The movement recalled him to himself, and he tried to force a smile.

‘I did not frighten you, did I, Lisa? I did not intend to do that. Don’t look so miserable, dearest. I meant nothing. But never say such a thing as that again, if you don’t wish to make me wretched. I can’t bear to think there is a chance of your changing towards me.’

Lisa drew a long breath of relief, for he was speaking like himself.

‘Why, Percy, you don’t think I meant it! I was only in jest. You can’t suppose I said it in earnest.’

‘No, dearest, no. But’—— He hesitated, and then repeated, ‘Don’t say it again, Lisa, even if it is only in jest. You don’t know what it would be if you trifled with me. I could not bear it.’

There was one thing, then, she could do which he would not like; and if he had not spoken as he did, she might have said something light with reference to his former speech. But she did not do so; she only said in a low voice—

‘I won’t do anything you don’t wish, Percy. You can’t really think I should ever trifle with you. It’s so impossible, that I am sure you are jesting now.’

He smiled, but made no other answer, and the subject was dropped, though there was just the slightest shade of constraint between them for the remainder of the way home. Slight as it was, it was sufficient to make Lisa uneasy; and when, on reaching the farm, they left her horse at the stable and she walked back with him to the gate, she looked so grave that he asked her what was the matter. Was she very much tired?

‘No, not at all.’ But a minute after a little hand came stealing into his. ‘Percy, I didn’t vex you, did I, when I said that silly thing? You are not angry with me?’

‘Angry with you!’ and his face brightened in a moment. ‘My darling, what could make you think so? No, I will tell you what it was. For one moment, I thought you were in earnest—that such a thing might be, and——well, never mind, it is not true. You are mine—you have promised me.’

‘Yes, and I like to think I have. If I had known you would take it in that way, I would never, never have said it.’

‘I know that, dearest. I am sorry I frightened you so much. Have you forgiven me, Lisa, or are you still afraid of me?’

‘Afraid of you! O Percy!’

‘Yes, afraid of me. You were before, Lisa. I did not like to see you look like that.’

‘Because you didn’t speak like yourself; you were so strange. But you are not now; you are just what you always are.’

He put his arm round her and gave her a long kiss, and then he went away without another word. And so the little cloud vanished.

It was the only one during the whole of that happy visit. Those long morning rides were, perhaps, Lisa’s chief delight: but there were other things almost as pleasant; and of these not the least were her rambles in the evening, when Percy was sure to come again, often with Mary, who liked to see what they were all doing. There was a great deal to talk of when she came, and long rambles about the farm and its neighbourhood with her and Percy; and when Mary was kept at home, he came alone, a fact which did not long escape the notice of Mrs Pye. ‘Of course,’ she said, ‘it was very right that Miss Lisa, who was not well, should have those long rides; and a great deal of good they did her, for she always came back from them with very bright eyes and colour; and it was quite proper, too, that Captain Tennent, who was her cousin, and so much older than herself, should go with her at such times; but when it came to his coming again in the evening, and staying so long too, why, then, she began to have her suspicions; and really, if Miss Lisa had not been such a little bit of a thing, she could have fancied there was something in it. As far as that went, however, one did hear now and then of young girls marrying men ever so much older than themselves.’ Miss Lisa’s sudden blush, too, when he happened once to come unexpectedly, and her evident disappointment another time when it rained, and something was said by one of the younger children about nobody getting over from the Priory that evening, these and a number of other little things were not lost upon Mrs Pye. But as the farmer only laughed, and Lane was evidently injured when anything of the sort was said, she kept her thoughts to herself.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE FIRST LINK IN A LONG CHAIN.

LISA came back from that visit to Copelands looking very different from what she had done two weeks before; and Dr Tennent, to whom she rushed for a kiss directly she entered the drawing-room, declared he should advise Mrs Pye to set up a regular boarding-house. If she could turn out many such roses as those Lisa had brought back with her, he had no doubt she would soon make her fortune.

‘Yes, providing the invalids, when they go there, have no more the matter with them than this one,’ remarked Mrs Tennent, drily. ‘Stand out of the light, child. Don’t you see I am working?’

‘Providing, too, they have Percy to look after them,’ put in Arthur. ‘I wonder how often he has been out there lately. Pretty nearly every day, I suspect, Miss Lisa? Did he think your morals wanted improving; or what was it gave you so much of his company?’

It was a random speech, and he was surprised at the effect it produced on more than one person in the room. Mrs Tennent coughed, the doctor fidgeted, and Lisa herself grew very crimson, and saying something about taking off her hat, vanished in a great hurry. Arthur glanced at them all in succession in no little astonishment.

‘What’s the matter?’ he said at last. ‘Everybody looks very queer. Is there anything in the wind?’

There was no answer. Dr Tennent looked at his wife, and then at his son.

‘Well, yes; I believe there is. And I don’t know that it need be a secret any longer; eh, my dear? eh, Percy? You don’t wish it not to be known, do you?’

‘Certainly not, sir—the sooner it is known the better, in my opinion. I always understood that directly this Copelands visit was over, it was to be made public. Mrs Tennent told me it should, and I suppose she sees no reason to retract her promise.’

Mrs Tennent jerked her needle out sharply, snapping her thread as she did so.

‘You know what I think about it, Percy. It has not my sanction; I consider it an exceedingly foolish business!’

Perhaps Percy thought he was old enough to judge for himself whether he were acting foolishly or not, for a smile passed over his face, and then he said quietly, but with a good deal of proud happiness in his tone, ‘Lisa and I are engaged.’

If a thunderbolt had fallen at Arthur’s feet, he could hardly have looked more petrified; and as for Isabel and Elinor, they were even more taken by surprise than he was. For some minutes not a word was said by one of them, and if Percy had expected congratulations, he must have been woefully disappointed by that blank silence. By degrees, however, Arthur seemed to come to himself.

‘Well,’ he said, slowly, ‘I don’t understand it, and that’s the truth. Lisa, that little chit! And to you! I beg your pardon, but really it’s so very odd. Of course it’s true, as you say it; only I had an idea—but I suppose I was mistaken.’

‘I suppose you were,’ Percy answered, rather stiffly.

‘Now, old fellow, don’t be offended;’ and Arthur jumped up from his chair. ‘You don’t think I’m not glad? I wish you joy with all my heart,’ wringing his cousin’s hand as he spoke. ‘But such a thing requires time to digest. Lisa is such a mite to begin with—why, she has only just been put into long frocks—woman’s dresses, I mean; and she’s not out of the nursery yet. She plays with Conny’s dolls, and makes herself very happy over a cart and horse with George; and really the idea of her coming out in such a new line is startling.’

‘You are quite right, Arthur,’ Mrs Tennent said. ‘The whole thing is very foolish. I am glad you see it in that light.’

‘In what light? It’s odd, certainly, but it’s very jolly. You don’t mean, ma’am, you don’t like it? that you don’t think little Scaramouch has shown her sense in making such a choice? Excuse my saying it, Percy, but—you are not exactly the sort of fellow I should have thought she would take a fancy to. You understand, don’t you?’

‘Quite,’ and Percy smiled a little, not in the least offended at this speech. He was as well aware as any one of his deficiencies; and there might be some pride in the thought that, in spite of



them all, he had been able to win the heart of his beautiful little cousin. Most probably, too, he was prepared for the surprise which was sure to be expressed by every one when Lisa's choice came to be known ; but there was a disappointment in store for him which he had not expected. Next to Mary, he always looked to Isabel for sympathy in everything, and he never doubted now that she would be the first to wish him joy. It was to her he turned when speaking of his engagement, hoping for a word or look to tell him how much she entered into his feelings.

But he waited in vain. When her first astonishment was over, she took up her work again, and neither spoke nor raised her eyes ; and although Arthur, in spite of very ominous coughs from headquarters, persisted in saying over and over again how very glad he was, and declaring Percy was the luckiest fellow in existence, not a word came from Isabel. Her brother watched her for a few minutes, and then crossing the room, sat down by her side.

'And so you are not going to give me a word, Isabel?' he said, half lightly, half reproachfully. 'You won't even tell me you are glad that Lisa and I are so happy? And yet I want to hear something from you more than any one.'

She did look up then, but it was not with the smile he had hoped to see.

'I don't know exactly what you want to hear, Percy ; but I am afraid if I were to say what I think, you would not like it. I don't wish to vex you, but'——

'But what?' and he looked hurt. 'You think, I suppose, I am too old for her—that she might have done better.'

'She! no, indeed! I think you might have done better. O Percy, she is not the wife for you—indeed she is not.' And Isabel's hand was laid imploringly on his arm. 'You cannot know her, or you would not think of her ; you will never be happy.'

'Nonsense, Isabel,' half angrily. 'Surely I must be the best judge of the sort of wife I want ; you can't expect me to marry to please you, or even to consult your taste in my choice. I did hope, though,' and he came back to his usual tone, but with even more than his usual affection in it, 'I did hope you would care for any one I chose ; that even if she were a stranger, you would love her for my sake. But Lisa! Lisa, whom you have

known so long, who must be like a sister to you already ! What on earth makes you think I shall not be happy with her ?

‘Everything,’ Isabel exclaimed. ‘She is not in the least suited for you ; and so you would feel if you knew her as I do. But,’ changing her voice as she saw his impatient look, ‘what is the use of saying anything about it ? As you said just now, you are not marrying to please me. There is no good, therefore, in talking of what will only vex us both.’

Percy bit his lip. ‘And that is all you have to say to me, then ? These are all the good wishes you have to give us ? They are not what I should have expected,’ he added, rather bitterly.

‘I was not speaking of wishes,’ Isabel said, hastily. ‘You know well enough that nobody can wish more for you than I do ; no one can care more to see you happy, and Lisa too’——

‘Well, and that is all I want,’ he interrupted. ‘Why did you look so grave, as if it was nothing to you whether we were happy or not ?’

‘Because’—— She hesitated. ‘Hoping is not expecting, Percy, and—I can’t say I am glad for what I am afraid won’t bring you happiness.’

He looked annoyed.

‘What makes you think it will not ? What has poor Lisa done to make you think so hardly of her ? She is the brightest, sweetest-tempered, and most loving little creature in the world. Why should you speak of her in that depreciating way ?’

‘I do not mean it to be depreciating. I like Lisa very much, and believe there is a great deal that is good in her ; but I have known her much longer than you have, and I know she has many faults.’

Percy’s head went up in the way in which he often showed displeasure.

‘She has, has she ? I am glad to hear it. I have a particular objection to people who are considered perfect. But pray, what are these dreadful faults which make you think so badly of poor Lisa ? She has too much spirit for you, I suppose ?’

Isabel looked grave. ‘I should like her spirit shown in a different way,’ she said ; ‘I don’t think it speaks well for the disposition of any one to be always in opposition to those who have the direction of them. But that was not what I was thinking of. You know what I once said of her—you know how very like’——

'Take care, Isabel,' and his face grew dark. 'Take care what you are saying, if you please. Remember what Lisa is to me now. She is my promised wife.'

'I know that—O Percy, how could you think of her? Yes, you must be angry with me if you like. I must say what I think. She is like her mother; she is light and frivolous; it is *that* makes me afraid for her, and afraid for you.'

'Oh!' and whether he looked most annoyed or most amused was difficult to say. 'And so that is the grand crime, is it? She is a child—and a very gay and simple one, who picks up pleasures where no one else would look for them; and because she has not learned to see life yet in a matter-of-fact view, she is set down as frivolous; and by you of all people! Isabel, I thought you had more penetration, and,' he added pointedly, for he was really piqued, 'more kindness than to judge her so harshly.'

Isabel's face flushed. 'I am sorry you think me unkind. If I am, though, it is because I think so much of you, Percy; because I should have liked—well, never mind now—there is no reason we should quarrel because we don't think alike.'

All very different from what he had hoped to hear from his favourite sister; and chilled, hurt, and disappointed, Percy walked away. Nor was Isabel herself much more comfortable. She felt she had said and done the wrong thing; that whatever Lisa's faults were, it was not the time to have discussed them; that it would have been better to look less to what was wanting in her cousin than to the many winning and attractive qualities which had won her brother's love. She felt half inclined to follow him and say something to efface the impression her words had left, but she did not follow the impulse. A new, unpleasant feeling had taken possession of her, and she would have found it extremely disagreeable to confess that there was something akin to jealousy in it.

But so it was. It is no easy matter to give up a place where we have been first; and Isabel had so long been in the habit of regarding her brother as belonging almost exclusively to herself, that it was hard to realise the fact that she must henceforth be content to stand only second in his affections. And that Lisa, so much younger, so far inferior to herself, should be the person to whom she was to yield what all her life she had most prized, made the trial harder. But she little knew what she was doing when allowing her feelings of jealousy to interfere with the sym-

pathy for which her brother looked, and lead her to depreciate her rival. Percy was not one to hear, with indifference, those whom he loved spoken of slightly. She had raised a barrier between them such as once she never had dreamed of; and though it was slight at first, and she thought but little of what a few words might so easily break down, those words were not spoken; and opportunities once lost, who can tell when they may return?

Lisa came back to the drawing-room unaware of the revelation that had taken place during her absence, and her confusion on finding her engagement no longer a secret, was so great that she was not likely to notice the silence of one or two among the many voices surrounding her. All she thought of was to escape observation; and looking very shy, and very crimson, she ensconced herself behind one of the farthest tables, and did her best to keep out of sight. But Arthur was not disposed to let her off so easily.

'I say, Lisa,' he said, sitting down opposite to her, 'what a lucky thing for you you didn't take my wager at Christmas! When did you begin to change your mind; or was it only fibbing, and you really admired him all along? 'Pon my word, I'm ashamed of you! I'd no idea you were such a hypocrite!'

'Arthur, how you tease!' Lisa exclaimed, in great distress.

'And so you have set up for a woman,' he said. 'And pray what do you mean to do when you are married? You will have to give up running and jumping, and all such amusements. You will have to sit indoors all day, receiving visitors and playing propriety. You won't like it, I can tell you; if you take my advice, you'll think twice before you plunge into the matrimonial state. And do you mean to live in barracks? Imagine the horrors of being shut up in two or three rooms; you, who have run wild all your life! And you will be a close prisoner, you may be quite sure; for Le Balafre—he shrugged his shoulders expressively—'is awfully particular, and won't even let you look out of window without his permission.'

'Won't he? Then I shan't do it,' Lisa said, very simply; and Arthur laughed.

'Taming down already, are you? I thought you were going to say, "Then I shall do it." Well, I shall like to see how you get on. I expect some fun; and if somebody is to be trusted,' looking at Mrs Tennent, 'I shall have it. Have you heard her mind yet upon the subject?'

Lisa said 'No,' and looked so frightened at the prospect of what she was to hear from her aunt, that Arthur took compassion on her blushes and confusion, and after a little more teasing left her to herself. All the rest of the evening she sat beside Mary, very quiet and very silent ; happily unconscious that it was not by her aunt alone that Percy's choice was disapproved.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

THE following day happened to bring a large party of relations into Atherstone. Lisa, who had no particular fancy to meet them sooner than necessary, kept out of the way all the morning, and when her work with Mary was ended, spent the half-hour before luncheon with Percy in the green-walk. She was returning to the house with him at one o'clock, when seeing the library window open, she turned in with some flowers she had been gathering. She imagined the room was empty, but as she was stopping for a moment while Percy stooped to disentangle her dress from the straggling branch of a rose-tree, she heard voices within, and her own name mentioned. It was Isabel speaking.

'I wouldn't mind,' she was saying, 'if Lisa were likely to make him happy ; but there is no depth, no earnestness of character about her. She is a pretty child, and no more ; very taking in manner when she pleases, but as light and frivolous as possible, and with no tastes to make her a companion to him. And then her mother ! You know all about that, Rose. And Lisa is just like her.'

'Yes, so mamma says. I don't remember Mrs Kennedy myself, but she says Lisa always reminds her of her ; that she has all her beauty, and is just like her in her ways. But you surely don't think Lisa would do anything so bad as that ! Fancy going off and leaving her husband and child—somebody told me Mr Kennedy broke his heart about it. But I never heard what became of her. It was a miserable affair altogether.'

What more might have been said would be hard to tell, but the dress was disentangled by this time, and Lisa stood within the window, to the no little consternation of the speakers. Her face was very white, but upon each cheek there burned a bright red spot. For a moment she looked at them without a word, while they gazed at her in silent dismay. Rose was the first to recover herself, and making an attempt to appear unconcerned, she held out her hand.

‘How do you do, Lisa? I was wondering where you were. Ah, I see; of course,’ with a smile, as she caught sight of Percy behind her. And then becoming alarmed at the fixed unnatural look of the large eyes that gazed upon her, ‘But how strange you look! is anything the matter?’

‘Yes,’ in a choked voice. ‘Rose, what was that you were saying just now about—about my mother?’ She shivered from head to foot as she spoke. ‘Tell me; I want to know what it was.’

Rose gazed at her in a frightened way. ‘Bless me, child, don’t look like that. It wasn’t meant for you to hear; and,’ gaining a little courage and trying once more to turn it off, ‘you shouldn’t have been listening. You know the proverb, “Listeners——”’

‘I wasn’t listening. I couldn’t help hearing. Rose, tell it me again; no one ever said so before.’

Rose glanced at Isabel in dismay. ‘Do you mean she never knew it? Lisa, I told you it wasn’t meant for you to hear. What is the use of asking questions which I can’t answer?’

‘Because you know it’s not true,’ Lisa exclaimed passionately. ‘How dare you say such things of *her*? You may say what you like of me—that I am light, frivolous, anything you please. I am not good, I know, and you may tell me so; but you shall say nothing against *her*—never, no, never. I won’t hear it, I won’t believe it; it is not true,’ she repeated, still more passionately. ‘Percy, you heard what she said; you will tell her it’s false—that it never, never could be true.’

But the sad, silent look with which Percy met her beseeching one, told her that it *was* true; and flinging down her flowers, she stood for a moment covering her face with her hands, and then rushed from the room.

‘And that was why you would never tell me about her; why you always put me off when I asked you where she was? O

Mary, it's very, very hard ;' and poor Lisa sobbed bitterly as she knelt by her cousin's side. 'I never thought such a thing as that. I have wondered all these years where she was, but somehow I always hoped she would come back—that I should see her again ; but now'——a fresh burst of tears choked her utterance.

'Dearest Lisa, I wish you had never heard it!' And Mary stroked her head caressingly ; her own tears falling fast.

'And now I can never hope to see her again. I couldn't—it would be too dreadful. Mary, I hope it isn't wrong, but I would rather have heard she was dead—yes, far rather. But not to know where she is, or anything about her, except that—that she is—O Mary, do you know ? Have you ever heard any more than Rose said just now ?'

'Yes, dear, I have,' in a low voice.

'You have ?' and she looked up with a wild, startled glance, but something in her cousin's face seemed to tell her what she was to hear, and she laid her head down again with a shudder. 'Mary, is she dead ?'

'Yes—dear Lisa, my child, you must not cry like that,' as the bitter sobs came again. 'You have nothing to be sorry for now for her. It was far better and happier for her to die as she did. I can show you a letter we had about her ; you won't feel so unhappy then, Lisa.'

'A letter ?'

'Yes ; a letter papa had last winter from Mr Hirst, when he was in Germany. He was at Wiesbaden, and he knew the chaplain there, who had seen her very often. You will feel there is no need to be unhappy about her any longer.'

Lisa gave a long, long sigh. 'When was it, Mary ? When did she die ?' she said at last in a broken voice.

'Last year, dear ; somewhere about this time, I think.'

'Last year—last August ! That was—let me see ; yes, that was when we were all staying at Copelands, and Arthur was with us. We were very happy then. I didn't think, Mary—I couldn't tell,' and her lip quivered, 'I couldn't tell that she was dying—lonely and miserable.'

'Not miserable, dearest,' said Mary, trying to still the burst of anguish that had followed these words. 'She was not miserable. You won't think so when you have seen that letter.'

'And afterwards in the winter when you heard of it, and all

this time too—I have been very happy—I knew nothing about it. Oh, why wasn't I told? Why did you all let me go on caring nothing for her; never thinking that I shouldn't see her again? Oh, it was cruel—cruel!’

‘Hush! Lisa dear; don't cry in that way—it was not cruel. You knew nothing of her history, then, you know; it was always thought better you should not. And why should you have been told what it would only have distressed you to hear, when we could give you no explanations with it? Indeed, dear, it was done for the best; and you must remember I should not have told you even now if you had not unfortunately learned what you were never meant to know. I thought then it would make you happier to hear that, as far as she is concerned, there is no more cause for grief.’

‘Yes, yes—oh, yes—I am glad for that, Mary—I am, indeed. I am glad you have told me; glad I can know it is not so bad as I thought at first. But’—— and she sobbed convulsively—‘I don't like to think of this past year, and my having been so happy, when—when she was gone for ever. Somehow I always hoped I should see her again. I was only a little child, you know, when I saw her last; but I remember how she used to kiss and play with me. I remember, too, the last time I ever saw her. It was one night, and I had been asleep, and I woke and saw her standing by me: she was going to a ball, I think, for she was dressed in white, and she had roses in her hair; but she was crying, oh, so sadly! and she must have been kissing me, for my face was quite wet with her tears. And then she went away, and I never saw her again. They told me the next day she was gone—that she would never come back. But I always hoped she would; and now—now I can hope no more!’

There was a long silence, broken only by her passionate weeping.

‘I wonder if she ever thought of me,’ she said at last; ‘whether she ever spoke of me. Do you think she did, Mary? Or do you think she had quite forgotten me?’

‘Forgotten you? oh, no! She must have thought of you very often. You shall see Mr Hirst's letter, dear, that will tell you everything.’

And there was another silence, till the opening of the door roused Lisa from her crouching posture by her cousin's side, and



made her look round hastily. It was Percy, and at sight of him she started up. For a moment she looked as if she longed to throw herself into his arms, for the comfort he could give her ; but the next, a new and painful thought seemed to strike her, for the colour rushed to her face, and she drew back.

‘No, Percy,’ she said sorrowfully, ‘you must leave me now. You must give me up. You heard what they said—what they said of me and of *her*. You can’t love me any longer.’ But in spite of the half resistance she made, he put his arm round her, and drew her to a sofa near.

‘Why, Lisa, am I not to love you now ? Because you are unhappy ? I should have thought that was a reason for loving you more, not for giving you up.’

‘Yes, it is. You heard what they said. I am not worth anything ; you can only be ashamed of me, and you must let me take back my promise. I didn’t know this when I made it, or’——

‘But I did. Lisa, dearest, don’t talk in that way. What difference can such a thing make to me ? I have known it all along ; and if I had not—if I had only heard it to-day for the first time, it could not change my feelings towards you. Nothing that any one else can do, even though she be your own mother, can ever make me think anything of you but what is pure and good.’

‘Ah, but other people may. You heard what Isabel said of me. If she thinks so, other people may. Perhaps, too, they may say worse things.’ She was crying so bitterly that she could not go on.

Percy’s brow had darkened visibly at the mention of Isabel’s name, and the arm that was round Lisa tightened its hold, and drew her still closer to him. ‘And if they do, my darling, all the more reason you should have some one to protect you, though I should like to know who will dare to say a word against my wife. Listen to me, my own dear little Lisa, and don’t cry for such thoughts as those. You are mine, and nothing can ever separate us. If you are unhappy, who has so good a right to comfort you as I ? You must not tell me to give you up ; I could not do it.’

And though Lisa’s tears still fell fast, they had lost all their bitterness ; though nothing Percy could do or say could ever remove the impression made by that revelation of her mother’s

history, or divest her of the feeling of shame which any thought of it brought back. She read the letter her uncle gave her with many tears; but she said nothing at the time, and never spoke of it again, though none the less did she dwell upon it in secret; and very dark for the time was the shadow that glimpse of the past cast upon her path.

At the end of that week, when she and Percy were sitting alone in the garden one evening, he spoke to her of his wish that their marriage should not be delayed very long; his leave would be up in November, and it would make him very happy if, when he went, he could take her with him. Did she think she could consent to such a thing? It was a great deal to ask, for he was afraid she had not thought much about it, and the time was rather short. She should wait a little to consider of it, and tell him by-and-by whether she could make up her mind to leave the Priory, and try life in a new home with him.

And as he said this, Percy looked at her anxiously, trying to get a glimpse of her face. But it was getting dark, and her head was turned away. He could make out nothing; and she was silent so long that he began to fear she did not like what he had said.

It was not that, however, that kept her silent; it was simple surprise. Although aware he would be going before long, it had never occurred to her that he would ask her to go with him. She had supposed they would be married in a few years, when she was more of a woman—her ideas upon the subject had not been very definite; indeed, she had thought very little about it. She had been content to live on in the present; and as long as he was with her, had not even cared to conjecture what she should do when he was gone. But this proposition of his! it was so unexpected that she did not know what to make of it; and when after some minutes still no reply came, Percy was confirmed in his opinion of having displeased her.

‘Won’t you speak to me, Lisa, dearest? You don’t like what I said? You think it is asking too much?’

‘No,’ she said; ‘it’s not that—but—Percy, I never thought about it before. I am not old enough to—to’——

‘Well, dearest, you shall do as you like,’ he said, finding she did not go on, though his tone betrayed his disappointment. ‘It is unreasonable of me, I daresay, to wish it; but I

sometimes how much older I am than yourself, and how different things look to you from what they do to me. You shall do as you please. I won't urge anything upon you, though I would have done my best, Lisa, to make you happy; you should have had no cause to regret anything you gave up for me.'

'That wasn't what I meant, Percy. I would give up anything for you in a moment; you know I would. But'—— She hesitated again, and then came out what was always her objection to any proposition: 'Aunt Helen wouldn't like it—she would never think of such a thing for one minute—and even if she did, I don't see how it could be, because I know nothing about anything. I have never done anything for myself before, and I am so little! It would never do—don't you see?' stopping rather abruptly.

'Yes, I see, dearest. Is that all?'

'I should make a mess of everything;' and Lisa pulled some flowers to pieces, and spoke very energetically. 'Besides,' coming back to her last starting-point, 'Aunt Helen would say "no."'

'I think not. If those are all your objections, Lisa, I don't see why we should not settle it. My father would like it to be soon, I know. And, Lisa, I am very tired of my lonely life. I used to find it dull before; and now it will be worse than ever if I have to go and leave you behind me. If you only knew how I hate the thought of my solitary rooms. Don't you think you could make up your mind to come and cheer them for me? You don't know how happy it would make me if you would say you won't let me go alone.'

'No more I will, Percy. I will do anything you like,' she said, in a low voice.

'Thank you, my darling,' and the tone said even more than the words. 'When shall it be, then, Lisa?' he went on after a long pause. 'Shall we say the beginning of October? We shall like to go somewhere before I am obliged to join again, and that will give us time.'

'Yes, so it will,' and she went on thoughtfully pulling her flower to pieces; but after considering them for some little time she added, 'Percy, I only want to please you—about the time, I mean; but there is one thing I should like.'

'What is it, dearest?' he asked, eagerly.

'Will you let us be married very quietly? People make a fuss sometimes at weddings. I have seen them now and then

at the church here, and I shouldn't like to be married in that way. I shouldn't have liked it at any time ; and now,' her voice faltered, 'I couldn't bear it now. Let it be very quiet, please.'

A request to which Percy was only too happy to accede. It was settled, therefore, that everything should be as quiet as possible ; and after some consultation with the heads of the family, the wedding-day was finally fixed for the 16th of October.

'Very short notice,' remarked Arthur, when this announcement was made. 'But that is all the better. It will be a relief to my mind when it's over ; for at present Percy is simply unbearable. If any unfortunate individual of the nobler sex speaks to Lisa, or even presumes to look at her, he is ready to knock us down. Well, he'll have enough of her soon ; for better, for worse, eh ? And in the meantime we must feel thankful that the present state of things is only to last seven weeks. I think, though, you might have done the thing handsomely when you were about it. Fancy cutting us out of all our fun on the occasion ! Not even allowing us a dance ! I call it "real shabby" of you, Scaramouch !'

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### AUTUMN LEAVES.

'AND now, child, I have told you what I think about it ; and I hope you see how foolish you are,' was the wind-up of a long lecture from Mrs Tennent to Lisa, on the morning after everything had been settled. 'I don't mean to say any more, because both your uncle and Percy are determined to have their own way, and have made all their arrangements without any consideration for my wishes. But I think you are very wrong, and that you have been much to blame all along. What business had a girl of your age to be thinking of such things ? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

‘Why, Aunt Helen?’ Lisa asked, nothing daunted, though her cheeks were scarlet—‘why am I to be ashamed of myself? It would have been very strange, I think, if I hadn’t cared for Percy, for he has been very kind and good to me. I can’t help loving him, and loving him very dearly too; and’——

‘Lisa! I am shocked! The idea of talking like that!’

‘I can’t help it, Aunt Helen. It is the truth. I do love him very dearly indeed, and I don’t see what harm there is in saying it. I shall tell him so in church soon before everybody, and why should I mind your knowing it? If I didn’t love him, you know, I shouldn’t marry him.’

Mrs Tennent looked at her with displeased gravity. ‘I think the sooner the subject is dropped, Lisa, the better. I hope you will soon learn to see your position in a more serious light; and I am sure it is time you did, for you have not very long to think about it. That reminds me, by-the-by, of something else I wished to say to you—and that is about your outfit. Your uncle told me he wished it to be the same in every respect as one of your cousins’ would be; but I don’t myself consider that at all necessary. Your position is not the same; and you know that in a few years there would have been even a greater difference between you. I shall get you all I think proper, but it will not be what they would have; nor do I wish you to fancy it is.’

Lisa was silent. She was accustomed to hear of her inferiority to her cousins, but the reminder was none the more pleasant on that account. She said nothing, however; and after a pause, Mrs Tennent rose, and unlocking her dressing-case, took something from it.

‘I suppose you may as well have that now,’ she said, holding it out without looking at her niece. ‘It was sent from Germany in the spring. I believe your father gave it.’

It was a gold locket set with turquoises, and Lisa took it with a trembling hand. She did not know that when everything else had been sold for bread, that one treasure had been kept, the last relic of better and happier days. And well for her she did not. It was pain enough to look at it as it was.

‘I shall never wear it,’ she said, in a low voice; her colour growing deeper and deeper, and the large tears coming down fast.

‘Very well, do what you like with it; it is nothing to me.

And now go, child. You understand about your outfit—that I shall get what I think proper, and expect you to be satisfied; for, as you know, you have no claim upon your uncle. It is a great thing for you to have had a home here so long; and you must not look to have things as if you were one of your cousins. You have no *right* to anything. Do you hear?’ For Lisa’s head was bent, and her eyes were fixed upon the locket with a long sad gaze, as if her thoughts were far away. She started now.

‘Yes, I heard.’ And so she had, the words at least, though she did not quite realise their meaning. She was only conscious, as she left the room, of a sense of extreme loneliness; of being very much in the way, and not wanted where she was. Well, that feeling would be gone soon. Percy would not think her a burden, though she did come to him penniless, with nothing but herself and her love to give him. And in that thought there was comfort; not only then, but in much that came to try her during the last few weeks of her life at the Priory.

Some allowance, however, was to be made for Mrs Tennent’s displeasure at this time; for among her objections to her niece’s marriage was, that it was to cause a change in her household, for which she was by no means prepared; and which threatened her with most serious inconvenience. This was nothing else than the intended departure of Lane.

‘Eh, Miss Lisa! what have you done?’ was the old nurse’s exclamation of dismay when her darling first hung about her neck, and told her ‘she was not going to live at the Priory much longer—that she was to marry her cousin and go away with him.’

‘Eh, dear, but you don’t know what you’re doing! Going to marry him, do you say? Why, my darling, he’s not good enough for you. He’s too old, and not handsome enough, and’——

‘I don’t like handsome men,’ Lisa interrupted. ‘And he’s not a bit too old. I like him all the better for being older than I am. He is quite good enough for me any day; and a great deal too good. And she smothered her old nurse with kisses, till she almost took away her breath.

‘O Miss Lisa, what a child you are! look what a mess you’re making of my cap! I declare it’s not fit to be seen; it never is when you come near me.’ And Lane, who prided

herself upon her stiffly-starched borders, had to get up and readjust her head-gear at the glass before she could proceed with her sentiments. 'I always thought, Miss Lisa, you would do a deal better for yourself. I know some one else who'd be glad enough to have you; and he is handsome and rich, and all you could want. You'd have done better to have chosen him. Ay, dear, you know who I mean; I see that by your colour. It's a pity you didn't wait for him.'

'I don't like him,' Lisa said, scornfully. 'Fancy comparing them! O Lane, how much you know about it!'

Lane gave a little sigh. She had been indulging in visions of greatness for her dear Miss Lisa, and it was mortifying to discover there was no truth in them; that, after all, Mrs Pye's conclusions were likely to turn out more correct than her own.

'Well, dear, you know best, but I thought you'd have done better—that I did. I should like to have seen you "my lady," and living at that fine place down there. Mr Thorpe will have it some day, they say; and plenty of money too. I should have liked that for you.'

'Would you? I shouldn't have liked it for myself. I don't want Mr Thorpe's place, or his money, or himself either. And fancy me "my lady"! I don't know what "my ladies" do or say; and I should want to run about and enjoy myself. I could never have done that at the Moat—it is such a dismal old place. You don't know how much happier I am now!'

'Well, dear, I'm glad to hear it;' but in spite of this assurance there was another sigh. 'And I hope the captain—major isn't he now?—I hope he'll never do anything to make you change your mind. I know nothing against him, to be sure, except that he's neither young nor handsome. But he's a soldier, and soldiers are never good for much. They are a sad lot, Miss Lisa! and it grieves me just terrible to think of your having to go and live among them; you'll be wishing yourself back again, I'm thinking, before the year is out. However, dear, if you go, I go too; you must take me with you.'

'You, Lane?'

'Yes, dear. You won't leave me behind, will you? I couldn't stay when you were gone, you know.'

'But, Lane, you won't like it. You were just saying I should be wishing myself back again, and what will you do? You

can't bear moving about ; and perhaps we shall have to do that very often.'

'Ay, I know that ; it's tramp, tramp about the country, and never settling anywhere—here to-day and there to-morrow, and off to foreign parts without time to turn yourself round. But that's just what I was thinking, Miss Lisa ; for what you'll do by yourself in such confusion is more than I can tell. You'll want somebody to look after you a bit, it seems to me.'

Lisa smiled. She thought there was some one to do that, but Lane evidently did not consider a husband's protection sufficient under the circumstances.

'And so, dear, I go with you. You'll speak to the captain, won't you, and settle it for me ? and—oh, my cap, Miss Lisa !' as Lisa made a rush to embrace her.

'You dear old Lane ! I shall like you to come so much ! But'—— she stopped suddenly, 'what will Aunt Helen say ? You were forgetting her ; she won't like you leaving.'

'I can't help that, Miss Lisa ; we are not slaves in this country, and she can't keep me if I have a mind to go. Not but that it will grieve me sorely to leave Master Georgie and all of them. But you come first ; you always did, for I took you when you were born, and I was with your mother before you ; so don't say another word about it, but just tell the captain I'm coming, and leave the rest to me.'

And so the last days of summer died out, and September also passed away. The mornings and evenings grew very fresh, and autumnal mists hung on the hill-sides. Chill breezes swept across the uplands, and woods were changing to brown and golden ; and in the Priory garden the lawn and gravel walks were strewn with the lime-trees' falling leaves. And Lisa walked among them as she had done in days gone by ; but her step by Percy's side was slower, and there was something of sadness in the glance of her large lustrous eyes as they watched the fading beauty of all around. She knew that long before the last leaf from those trees came down, she would be far away ; and that when their boughs were once more clothed with green, her life at Atherstone would have become a dream.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE LAST EVENING IN THE OLD HOUSE.

THE day before the wedding came, last visits had been paid—last good-byes said ; and for the last time Lisa was sitting where she had so often sat in the old days that were gone now—on the hearthrug before the fire in the schoolroom by Mary's side. It was getting dusk, and a mist was gathering without ; and the low voice of the wind among the boughs above the casement window had something sad in its tones ; telling, it seemed, of long partings—of meetings that might never come—and of all the thousand changes and chances that life must bring.

For a long time she had sat in silence, watching the flicker of the firelight ; but a deep sigh from her at last, made Mary look at her.

'What is it, dear ? You are tired, I am afraid ; you have been walking so much to-day.'

'No, I'm not. I was thinking, that was all—thinking what hard things good-byes are. I don't like to think how long it may be before I see everybody again. And then, Mary, there's the hardest good-bye of all to come to-morrow !' And she seized her cousin's hand and squeezed it very tight. 'Mary, you have been so very kind to me. I can't bear to think of leaving you.'

There were hot tears falling on the hand she held, and Mary's only answer was a long kiss ; it was some minutes before she could trust herself to speak. When she did, however, though it was an effort, her tones were almost as cheerful as usual.

'I don't like it either, Lisa dear ; only I know you are going to be very happy, and I suppose we ought not to cry about that.' She laughed a little as she spoke, for a large tear came down at that moment. 'That was a mistake ; I didn't mean it.' It would be selfish of me to wish to keep you here when I know you are going to be happier somewhere else. Besides, I suppose you mean to ask me to pay you a visit sometimes ?'

'Ah, Mary ;' and Lisa brightened considerably. 'When will

you come? Will you let it be very soon? How I wish you could live with us always!’

‘Thank you, dear. I am afraid that could hardly be managed. I have too much at present to do here. But I shall like to come and see you, and I hope it won’t be long before I do. We will have a very happy time together then, Lisa.’

‘Yes, so we will. I’ll make everything so pleasant for you, Mary. And I shall be so glad for you to see what I am doing. I mean to try hard to be just what I ought, and to make Percy very happy. And don’t you think I can?’

‘Yes, dear, to be sure you can; anybody can do what is right if they are only in earnest.’

And Lisa knew from her cousin’s tone what she meant. For a moment she was silent, and then she said, in a low voice, ‘I shall try; and I think, Mary, it will be in the right way.’ She sat looking at the fire again for some minutes lost in thought; but turned round again at last with a smile. ‘Mary, how I wish you would marry, and come and live near us! How pleasant it would be! I don’t want you always to stay as you are now.’

‘Why not?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; but you were meant to marry. You would make such a good wife. And I don’t like you to’——

‘To be an old maid,’ said Mary, smiling. ‘But why should you dislike it, Lisa? Old maids are not so disagreeable in these days. A great deal of good is done by some of them; and I may be one of the pleasant sort, and make myself of so much use in the world, that perhaps people may forget I have the misfortune not to be married. And I suppose you won’t love me any the less if I keep single?’

‘Mary, what an idea! But you would be sure to do good anyhow, whether you were single or not; and—I should like you, besides being of use to other people, to be happy yourself.’

‘And you think I am not happy? Do I look so miserable?’

Lisa laughed. ‘Well, not exactly; that was an odd thing for me to say, certainly; for I don’t think I ever saw anybody happier than you are, Mary. I wonder sometimes why you are. You don’t have everything as you like—you have a great deal to plague you; but I never see you look miserable as some people do. You seem as happy as the day is long.’

‘And so I am. So much for your theory about marrying

you see. No, Lisa dear, I will tell you what I think about it. Marriage may be a very happy thing; and sometimes it is sent as a great blessing. But when things stand in the way of it, and we know it can't be, then we must find other interests to take its place, or else it seems as if we were repining at our lot, and could not be satisfied with anything but what we should choose for ourselves. And that would be so ungrateful; for why should we forget all the good things that are given us, and think only of the one we can't have?'

'And you think, then, you are not meant to marry?' Lisa said, quickly.

'I don't think it at all likely I shall.' And Lisa did not see her cousin's face as she spoke.

'But, Mary,' after a minute's pause, 'what makes you think so? You don't mind my asking, do you? You are just the person I should have thought would marry. Why should you think you won't?'

And then, as there was no answer at once, she looked up.

'O Mary, what have I said? Have I vexed you? How silly of me to ask such questions! But I didn't know'—— in great distress.

'No, dear, of course you did not,' said Mary, trying to smile. 'Never mind, Lisa, you have not vexed me. It was only for a minute. I was thinking of something; thinking how different things might have been if——if'——

'Don't, Mary, don't tell me anything,' Lisa exclaimed, beseechingly. 'I am so sorry. I never meant to give you pain.'

'No more you did. And it is so long ago now that I don't know why I should mind talking of it. Ten—twelve—yes, nearly thirteen years ago,' and she thought a little. 'Thirteen years ago. I was not much older then than you, Lisa. I fancied then I was going some day to be happy in—in the way you want me to be,' she said, stroking her cousin's hair fondly. 'We were engaged; we had been boy and girl together. He was three years older than I was; and so good and clever. I was very proud of him. But he was very poor, and we knew we should have to wait a long time. We had been engaged two years, and then he had an appointment offered him in India; it was much better than he was ever likely to get in England, and we thought he ought to take it. And in ten years he hoped to have enough to marry on, and then he was to come back for me.'

‘Ten years! And you were never to see him all that time? O Mary!’

‘Yes, dear; it seemed a long, dreary time to wait. But I did not know then I should have to wait much longer before I saw him again. I had one letter from him after he left—they were off St Helena then—and I never had another.’

Lisa looked up quickly. ‘What do you mean, Mary? ‘Did he—was he’——

‘The vessel never reached India; they were never heard of afterwards.’

‘O Mary!’ and Lisa covered her face with her hands, and for a long time there was a silence.

‘But are you sure—quite sure?’ she said, at last. ‘Did you never hear anything at all?’

‘Not a word. I hoped on for months and months—long after every one else had given him up; but I knew at last how it was. I felt he was really gone.’ There was a sigh as she spoke, but no tears; only Lisa’s were falling fast.

‘Mary, how miserable you must have been! I wonder you didn’t die!’ she said in a low voice, and with a shudder. ‘If Percy were taken from me like that I should die. I know I should.’

‘No, Lisa dear, you would not; people don’t die so easily; nor were we meant to give ourselves up to grief in that way. I was miserable at first—very miserable, and wicked too. I had all sorts of hard, bad thoughts. But I saw things differently after a time, and found there was a great deal for me to do, and a great deal left to make me happy, if I chose to be so. It was then, Lisa, that you came to us; and when I had the care of you, that terrible blank filled up by degrees. It was you who helped most to make me happy again.’

‘By being naughty and troublesome, and teasing you all day long,’ Lisa exclaimed, with something between a laugh and a sob. ‘O Mary, what a torment I have been to you! And you so patient, so good to me all the time! What a bad, good-for-nothing creature I have been!’

‘You need not call yourself such hard names, Lisa. Your love has been worth having. And I don’t think you will care for me any the less now because you are going away?’

‘Care for you any the less! I shall love you ten hundred times more now than I ever did. I shall always be thinking of you;

and shall never forget all you have done for me.' She looked as if she would have liked to say a good deal more, but her words did not come so readily as usual. After a pause, however, she added, wistfully, 'And it is true, Mary? After all that, you are really happy?'

'Yes, indeed I am; much happier than I can tell you. With a home where I can be useful, and so many people to care for me, it would be ungrateful to be miserable because my life is not what I should have chosen for myself. And then there is always one hope I have—it is not as if I thought I should never see him again. Yes, Lisa dear,' she added after a minute's pause, 'there is a better kind of happiness than that which comes from having things just as we like.'

It was a truth which Lisa, with that face before her, could fully realise; nor could all the sermons in the world have preached such a lesson to her as did the thought of the patient, cheerful, and self-denying life of which for years she had been a witness, but which until now she had only half understood.

She did not say much—her heart was too full for that; but as she sat in the dusk of that still October evening, going over the past—the careless, unthinking past—and dwelling on the future that lay before her, her thoughts were turned into something more than mere wishes that the days which were coming might be better than those that were gone. There was an earnest prayer for higher aims, and more strength of purpose, than she had ever yet possessed; and the very few words which were all Mary then said to her in the way of advice or direction, went far to strengthen the impressions and resolves of that hour. They went all the farther, perhaps, because they were so few; and more still because they were borne out by her cousin's own practice. Lisa never forgot them.

That night, when she was alone in her little room for the last time, she lingered long at her window, unable to realise to herself that her life at the Priory had drawn to its close; and that at that hour on the morrow she would be far away from the place that for so many years had been her home. She looked round on the bare walls, the uncarpeted floor, and shabby furniture, and felt it would cost her a pang to leave even these; and then she turned again to the window, and looked out into the garden, where, through the mist, the moonlight was shining on the lawn, and on the half-leafless lime-trees that shaded the green-walk, where

as a child she had danced and played, where lately she had so often sat and talked with Percy, and where he had first told her of his love. There, too, among the trees close by, was the old church, where on the morrow she was to plight her troth to him; and its chimes were ringing out now as they had rung for years, and as they would go on ringing still when she was not there to hear them. Familiar sights and sounds they all were; and parting from familiar things must always bring a pang, even when they are to be left for greater happiness. Perhaps she might never see them again—never come back there; and if she did, she could never be again what she had been—her childish days would be far away in the vanished past. It was with a long-drawn sigh that she turned from her window and prepared for rest; and when she knelt to pray that night her prayers were longer than usual, and very earnest; and her young face looked grave in its intensity of thought, when at length she fell asleep to dream, not of the coming morrow, but of times gone by; and to fancy herself again a little child sitting by Mary's side, and learning from her all the best and holiest lessons that had helped to influence and soften her wild impetuous nature.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WEDDING-BELLS.

It was a quiet wedding-party that met in the Priory drawing-room on the following morning, none but a few near relations having been asked to be present at the ceremony.

But although their own numbers were small, poor Lisa's wishes for privacy were not attained; for, in spite of the precautions that had been taken to keep the day a secret, it had become very generally known; and the church was early filled with a crowd, not only of friends and acquaintance, but of strangers from all parts of the town.

Percy, too, being a Crimean hero, was the subject of no small curiosity, though, as he came in at the chancel door with Arthur, and for a few minutes stood alone near the altar while waiting for the rest of the bridal party, there were not a few who marvelled at Lisa's choice, and wondered what there could be in that plain, dark, sombre-looking man to have won the heart of one so young and lovely ; the prettiest bride that had been seen in the old church for many a long day, though she was unconscious of the gaze of admiration that followed her as she passed up the aisle. Her thoughts were given to the only person of whose presence there she knew anything ; and when meeting him and kneeling by his side, everything else was forgotten.

It was a bright autumnal morning ; and the fresh wind stirred among the trees that bordered the churchyard wall, bringing down in showers their brown and yellow leaves, and then wandered on among the tombstones, to make its way in at the chancel door, and play among the folds of Lisa's long white veil and dress ; while through a stained window the sun's rays fell with a chastened glow on her bent head and golden hair, and lighted up with a glory that was hardly of earth, the pale, pure beauty of her youthful face. There was not a trace of colour in it, but there were no other signs of agitation about her ; and although her voice, when she spoke the solemn words that bound her for life, was very low, it was clear and unfaltering ; and none who heard those earnest tones could doubt that they came from her very heart. Few, too, who saw the look with which, as they rose from their knees, she raised her eyes to Percy's, ever forgot it.

The business of signing names was soon over ; and then the little party passed through the church once more, and out at the western door ; Lisa, however, hardly so unconscious now, as she had been before, of the gaze of so many ; and when, on leaving the porch, a little girl stepped forward to offer her a bouquet, a deep blush mounted to her pale face as she looked up and became aware of the number of curious eyes fixed upon her. A smile, very shy, but very sweet, was the only thanks she could give for the flowers ; and Percy felt her hand trembling on his arm as he led her on after that moment's pause. Out into the bright sunshine they went ; the bells in the old tower ringing merrily, and fresh airs blowing round them ; while in the trees above their heads the robins sang, and ever floating downward came the autumn leaves, clustering about

their path. They were crushed beneath Percy's firm tread, and Lisa's dress swept them as she passed; and Mary, whose eyes, dimmed with tears, had never been taken from 'her child,' saw her smile once as she stopped for a moment to brush away some that had caught in her veil.

Poor Mary! She had hard work that morning to keep back her tears; but she did her part bravely, and no one guessed the pang she felt each time she looked at the fair childish face she loved so well, and which she knew she should miss so sadly in the long days to come. It seemed as if she could hardly look at it enough, so often did her eye turn to the little figure at her brother's side, and so lingering was her glance when it rested there. But it would not do to show what she was feeling, and least of all to let Lisa suspect it. It would not do to let her know what that parting must be; and for her sake Mary's face wore a cheerful smile, and she would not let her spirits flag.

But the time for good-byes came. When breakfast was over, Lisa went to her room to change her dress, and Mary went with her. She had intended to make a great deal of that half-hour; but now it was really come, she could not speak a word; while Lisa, who seemed equally afraid to trust the sound of her own voice, hurried through her preparations as if unwilling to give herself time to think; and when she was ready, left the room without even pausing for one last look round.

They went down-stairs together, and in the hall found all the party assembled; Dr Tennent, in a fidget as usual on such occasions, thinking they would miss the train.

'Good-bye, my child,' he said, folding Lisa in his arms as she came up to him. 'You have no time to lose. Percy, take good care of her and make her happy.' And with a long kiss he let her go to hurry her through the rest of her leave-takings.

'Good-bye, Lisa; I hope you will remember what has been said to you and do your duty;' was Mrs Tennent's farewell; and Lisa looked up at her with her large beseeching eyes.

'Aunt Helen, I have vexed you very often; given you a great deal of trouble, I am afraid. Won't you forgive me before I go?'

Mrs Tennent smiled coldly. 'Forgive you! Oh yes, child, I am not angry with you; though you have never taken much pains to please me. But it is not the way of the world to be grateful for kindness, so I am not disappointed at your being no



better than the rest of them. And I am glad you see your faults now, though it would have been better if you had done so a little sooner, and shown your sorrow by actions rather than words. But I am not angry with you. Good-bye.'

And then came a long round of good-byes from every one, and a very quiet one from Isabel, with a still quieter, 'I hope you will be happy, Lisa,' in a tone of considerable magnanimity, which had a more freezing effect than was perhaps intended. But when Lisa came to Mary, she held her tight in a close clinging embrace that was convulsive in its grasp, though not a word was uttered by her, and even tears were kept back.

'God bless you, my darling,' Mary whispered; it was all she could say, and there was a tighter pressure still, but not a sound from Lisa.

'Now then, my child! you can't stay there,' exclaimed her uncle, in his kind voice, but looking more in a fidget than ever. 'Let her go, Mary; they'll lose the train if they don't mind.' And Lisa loosened her hold then; but as she turned away, she came upon Bär sitting on the door-mat—Bär, the old house-dog, with whom she had played and run races ever since she had been a little child; and at sight of him came the climax to her pent-up feelings. She flung herself on the floor beside him, and throwing her arms around his neck burst into a passionate flood of tears.

'Hallo, Mrs Percy Tennent!' exclaimed Arthur, who had been walking about all this time with an old white shoe in his hand. 'Hallo, Mrs Percy! I think you forget you are married. Remember your dignity, if you please; the floor is not the proper place for you now.' A speech which caused a diversion by raising a laugh; and Lisa, a little ashamed of herself for having given way when she had meant to go off so bravely, got up hastily and brushed away her tears. She would not even look round again, but without a word, let her uncle lead her to the carriage. Percy followed her, and the next minute they were off; Arthur carrying out his intention of being the first to wish them good luck in orthodox fashion, by taking the initiative in the shower of old shoes that followed them. There was a great deal of laughing and talking; and in the midst of it came a loud cry from little George, who having now seemingly realised the fact that his dear Lisa was gone, set up a howl of mingled sorrow and defiance which startled everybody.

And in the prevailing confusion Mary made her escape, and stole away up-stairs. To Lisa's deserted room first, where she picked up a stray glove, a handkerchief, and one or two things that had been left there ; and after putting them carefully away and standing for some minutes looking round on everything with a dreary aching sense of desolation at her heart, she went to her own room and sat down where, the day before, she had sat with her cousin beside her. The red light of the autumn sun streamed in through the open window, and she watched its play upon the floor, and the dance of the shadows from the lime-tree leaves, and felt that for her the best sunshine of the house was gone—that the light and brightness of her life had passed away. And her thoughts went back then to another time, long, long ago, when far more sad and desolate than now, she had sat there, and a little child had come to comfort her ; a little child of winning beauty, with golden hair, and wild, dark, shy eyes ; whose loving ways and warm affection had roused her from her grief, and given her new hopes, new interests. For years that child had been her first thought, her chief care ; and in her love she had found her greatest earthly happiness. And to-day she had given her up. To-day she had seen her, a child still and lovely as ever, stand at the altar as a bride, and had heard her bid farewell to the home where she had lived for so many years. And in fancy, Mary saw before her still that sweet girlish face in all its beauty, and felt round her yet the loving arms that had been so unwilling to let her go. Very long it *might* be before she felt their clinging embrace again ; and long, very long, it *must* be before the blank which that day had made in her life could be filled up ; though even in her sorrow she forgot to be selfish.

‘Dear little Lisa!’ she said to herself with a sigh ; ‘my little Lisa, my own child ! It is hard to let you go. But you will be happy—I hope—yes, I am sure you will. I would not have to-day undone if I could.’

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

‘THIS SWEET WEE WIFE O’ MINE.’

THE long winter months were over, and spring, with its sunshine and its showers, its opening leaves, its early flowers and lengthening days, had come round once more. It was one bright afternoon late in April that Arthur Darrell stood upon the platform at the Gainsford station, watching a London train which was slowly coming in more than twenty minutes after its time.

‘Ah, Janet, there you are!’ he exclaimed, as he caught sight of a well-known face at one of the carriage windows. ‘Well, better late than never. I began to think you wouldn’t come at all. What has made you so behind-hand?’ And he made desperate attempts to open the door of the carriage in which his sister-in-law was seated. Finding his efforts useless, he was about to call to a porter when an unexpected apparition behind Janet made him pause.

‘Why, Nelly,’ he exclaimed, ‘where did you spring from? and Isabel, too, I declare! Well, there’s no end to wonders in this world; nor,’ with a low bow to his cousins, ‘to the rewards that virtue meets with.’

‘And now perhaps you will make yourself of some use,’ said Janet a little testily. ‘You can leave your flourishing till we get home. Oh dear, how hot it is, and I am so tired!’

‘You brought the carriage, of course?’

‘I did, ma’am. You don’t think I was going to walk a mile and a half such a day as this when I could have a carriage for nothing? Besides, how was I to get you home without it? Did you expect me to carry all these?’ looking at the various articles piled upon the seat.

‘You can see they are carried across the platform, I suppose?’ remarked Janet. ‘And do be quick, please. There are not so many after all; for I make a point of never taking much luggage with me when I travel. It’s so tiresome to look after.’

‘So it is, ma’am; I quite agree with you,’ said Arthur gravely. ‘I was just wondering how you had contrived to manage with so

little. Here it comes, big carpet-bag, little ditto, travelling-bags, one, two, three, four, five. And what are these? Oh, bonnet-boxes of course; they are too precious for the luggage-van. And here are three dressing-cases, and a bundle of cloaks, shawls, railroad-wrappers, &c. And that's all, I do believe, except books, newspapers, parasols and umbrellas. I wonder whether two trucks will take everything to the carriage?' in deep consideration of the pile before him.

'Nonsense, Arthur; pray see about them quickly; you have no idea how tired I am.' And Janet walked off with a little bag and her own parasol in her hand, Isabel following her; but Elinor lingered behind to help in the identification of divers trunks and portmanteaux which were to be sent after them. The business was a lengthy one apparently, from the time they were absent, but they made their appearance at last; and cloaks, bags, &c., having been tumbled into the carriage, they set off in the highest spirits; even Elinor, being roused into animation, and looking about her with eager curiosity as they drove through the streets of Gainsford, where she had never been before.

'We are in a very convenient situation,' Janet said; 'for we are near enough to the town to see plenty of people; and yet we have the advantage of country air and country walks, besides not being far from the sea.'

'A little of everything, and in consequence neither fish, flesh, nor fowl,' remarked Arthur. 'And now, Isabel, let me hear what happy chance has brought you into this part of the world. I know nothing yet to account for your extraordinary appearance.'

'Nothing very extraordinary about it,' said Isabel. 'It was always settled, you know, that I was to come some time this summer; and at first it was arranged that Mary and I should come together in August. But mamma said it would be more convenient for only one of us to be away at a time; so Janet proposed I should pay my visit now and go back when Mary comes. And then we thought it would be no bad thing for Elinor to have a change too. She has not been well lately.'

'Hasn't she? I should never have guessed it. I meant to pay her a compliment on her blooming looks, only I haven't had time yet.'

Elinor certainly did look 'blooming;' but perhaps it was from fatigue and the heat of the day—for the weather had suddenly

set in very warm, and was almost oppressive. The afternoon sun, too, was shining full down upon them; and of course it was her anxiety to shade her face from that, which made her interpose her parasol so hastily between herself and Arthur as he was turning to look at her.

‘Thank you, Nelly—but you needn’t put my eyes out,’ he observed in an injured tone. ‘Well, I congratulate you on your spirit—I had no idea any of you could have devised and accomplished such an achievement as getting away at half-a-day’s notice; you left yesterday of course?’

‘Yes, it was settled yesterday morning,’ said Janet; ‘and we were off in the afternoon. Ah, here we are at home; and very glad I am! I don’t know when I have been so tired!’

They were turning in at some white gates as she spoke; and a very pretty drive along the edge of a well-kept lawn, and under some fine chestnut-trees, took them up to the entrance of a villa-like residence, standing on sloping ground and covered with creepers of all sorts, which gave it a cool and shady look, and made Elinor declare it one of the prettiest places she had ever seen. She was so delighted with it, that instead of going indoors when they alighted, she went round with Arthur to have a look at the other side; while Janet disappeared in all haste to give orders for the accommodation of her visitors; and Isabel took refuge in the drawing-room until her own room should be ready for her. They did not all meet again until nearly dinner-time; and then Elinor appeared in a state of perfect rapture at the beauty of everything, and the lovely views that were to be seen on all sides.

‘I had no idea it was half so pretty,’ she exclaimed. ‘By-the-by, where does Lisa live, Janet? Is it far from here?’

‘Yes—no—well, it’s about ten minutes’ walk. I don’t know whether you call that far or not.’

‘Not very far certainly,’ said Elinor, a little puzzled at her cousin’s tone.

‘Not far? Oh! well, she does then. I suppose we shall see more of her now you are here; or else she is not in the habit of favouring us with many visits.’

‘Ahem,’ said Arthur; ‘that’s rather good, Jenny; considering they have only been here since—when was it they came?’

‘Before Christmas,’ said Janet tartly.

‘Before Christmas, was it? Well, anyhow, considering that two months of that time you have been away, and that for another

three or four weeks Percy was ill, it's early to begin to complain of want of sociability.'

'Is it? I don't think so. Besides, it's easy, from a person's manner, to see whether they care for your acquaintance or not. But if Lisa don't want to be friends with me, it's her lookout, not mine. I am sure I was kind enough when she first came, and did everything I could to be friendly and sociable; but she never seemed to care to be much with me. Nobody would guess we were such near connections, to see how little we know of each other.'

There was a very quiet, under sort of laugh from Arthur at this; but Isabel looked vexed.

'I am sure that is not what Percy wishes,' she said hastily. 'You may be certain, Janet, it is not his desire that you and Lisa should not be friends.'

'I daresay not,' said Janet with a smile. 'But the fact is, I don't suppose his wishes have anything to do with it. Lisa does just what she pleases. I never saw anybody make themselves so foolish as he does about her. To hear him talk, you would suppose there was nobody like her in the world.'

A smothered laugh again from Arthur.

'What are you laughing for, Arthur?' Janet asked sharply. 'It is true—any one can see he worships her. I call it ridiculous the fuss he makes about her. He is as proud as possible because she gets very much admired. She is considered a great beauty, and made quite a sensation here in the winter. It is my belief her head is turned with all the nonsense she hears. She seems to me to think of nothing but dress, and extravagance of all sorts.'

'Poor little Scaramouch!' remarked Arthur, 'she used to get scolded by everybody because she didn't trouble herself enough about her dress; and now you are finding fault with her for thinking too much of it. What is she to do between you all, I wonder? She always looks "uncommon" pretty; but I don't know that she can help that. And if Percy likes to see her well dressed, perhaps there is no harm in her consulting his taste rather than yours.'

'Perhaps not,' said Janet, 'particularly when it happens to agree with her own.'

'Well, I must say I consider Scaramouch wonderfully improved. Whether it's her dress or not, I don't know; but she's

about the prettiest girl I have seen anywhere. And she has come out astonishingly, too, lately. I was never more surprised in my life than when I dined at their house, the first time after I came down here, and saw that child sitting at the head of the table, and really looking as if she knew what she was about. She was a wee bit nervous, certainly, for it was a large party; and she confessed to me privately she didn't like it at all, and was dreadfully frightened; but she didn't show it. I had no idea she would ever be so much of a woman in her ways, and I give her great credit for it; all the more, too, because I believe she would far rather amuse herself with a doll or a skipping-rope than play propriety in a drawing-room. It was only yesterday, indeed, that I caught her sitting on the floor nursing two kittens; and she looked so happy over them, that I was quite sure she must be in the habit of indulging in such amusements on the sly. And when I taxed her with it, she did not deny it—she seemed to consider it a very proper and rational employment.'

'I can quite believe it,' said Janet; 'she is so absurdly childish. You saw her yesterday, though, you say; did you tell her I was coming home?'

'I did; and she seemed highly delighted, and declared her intention of walking up this evening to see you.'

'This evening!'

'Yes,—I won't swear her motives for coming are purely disinterested. There was something about a parcel from Mary that she was expecting; she was so eager about it, that I presume she is pretty sure to turn up.'

'Very likely,' said Janet carelessly. 'Here is Ralph, however, turning up now, which is far more satisfactory, for we can have our dinner. Who is that with him, too? Oh, Cunninghame; when did he come, I wonder?'

As she spoke, Mr Thorpe's handsome face and figure appeared in the doorway. He was a little astonished at sight of the unexpected visitors, but recovered himself sufficiently to be extremely polite; while Ralph, who followed him, took their coming as a matter of course, expressing no surprise whatever on the subject. Whether, indeed, he were aware of their presence after he had shaken hands with them was doubtful, for he said little, even to his wife, and during dinner was absorbed in his own meditations, leaving the conversational part of the entertainment to be supplied by his brother.

Arthur was in the highest spirits; delighted at the unwonted sociability of the present meeting after the solemn tête-à-tête dinners to which he had been accustomed; for his brother's house was his home now, and had been since the termination of his college career early in the spring. He had a private tutorship in the neighbourhood of Gainsford while waiting for ordination, and several hours of each day were fully occupied with his duties; but his evenings were spent at Lassell Lodge, and the addition of two of his cousins to the family party was by no means unwelcome. It was almost as good, he declared, as being at the Priory, and so Lisa would think; she was always talking of the old place.

'And here she is!' was his exclamation, when, as they were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, a ring at the hall-bell told of visitors. 'I'll lay anything it's little Scaramouch. Now for a scene.' And as a servant, opening the door, announced 'Major and Mrs Percy Tennent,' he rose from his seat and drew himself up in an ecstasy of suppressed expectation and amusement.

'Scaramouch' was decidedly not the appellation for the very graceful girl who entered the room, and whose extreme beauty and quiet elegance of dress could not fail to attract the attention of even the most casual observer. Radiantly happy she looked, too, though with something still of her old shyness about her; and her eye, as it went round, had the same half-startled, wild-fawn-like glance, which all who had known little Lisa Kennedy remembered well. Unchanged also she was in many other respects; for upon seeing Elinor, the momentary childish look of surprise, and then the bright smile flashing like sun-light across her face, were Lisa all over; and so was the warm-hearted embrace that followed.

'Nelly, dear Nelly! How delightful! How very glad I am! You came with Janet, did you? we never expected you!' And whether she were most inclined to laugh or cry seemed doubtful, while she poured out a torrent of expressions of extravagant happiness; until Arthur, who was looking on as if it were a pantomimic performance got up for his benefit, interposed, and begged her to reserve the rest of her ecstasies, as there was some one else there whom she had not yet seen.

'Not Mary, surely!'

And if it had been Mary, there was no saying what might not



have happened; but as her eye met Isabel's, her face fell considerably. It was only for a moment; and although afterwards she seemed pleased to see her cousin, the latter had noticed the change, and set her down as insincere in her expressions of gladness. She was vexed also to notice how often, while talking to her, and asking questions about home, Percy's eye was wandering off to Lisa; and how, unable from his short-sightedness to see her well, he kept putting up his glass to observe her movements, and watch her face while she was speaking. It was plain, even during the short half-hour they were at Lassell Lodge that evening, that Janet's account had not been exaggerated—that he was wrapped up in his little wife, and worshipped her with an almost adoring love. Every look and word betrayed it; and if Isabel had not been too much annoyed to be amused, she might have smiled to see how completely he was absorbed in Lisa.

They did not stay very long, for they had only called on their way home; and Lisa said she was tired and wanted to get back. She had her parcel, too, for which she had come, and a letter with it; and her eagerness to open both was visible from the way in which she kept eyeing them.

'Though why Mary thought it necessary to write when you were sure to hear everything from Isabel and Nelly, is more than I can tell,' said Arthur. 'You have had one letter from her already this week; what in the world do you want another for so soon? I should have thought this day month would have done.'

'This day month!' Lisa looked horrified. 'Why, I have a letter twice every week regularly. She tells me everything, and then I know all that is going on there. And I write back and tell her all I do. It is very pleasant.'

'Is it? I should have thought you were perfect plagues to each other. So much for my weak intellect, which is not able to appreciate such an amount of epistolary composition. Well, I will come down to-morrow and hear the news; though of course it's all stale. I'll call as I come back from the Crawfords' in the afternoon.'

'Yes, do,' said Lisa; 'and stay and dine with us. Isabel and Nelly are going to spend the day with me, and Janet says she will come in the evening, so if you come too, we shall be quite a family gathering.'

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE COTTAGE BY THE SEA.

THE cottage in which Percy and Lisa were located (for he had shrunk from exposing her to the discomforts of barrack-life), stood close to the sea on high ground overlooking the beach, which was reached from their garden by steps cut in the rock. The house itself had nothing remarkable about it, being just such an one as might be met with any day in the neighbourhood of large towns, and having a dozen others all of the same size and build in every direction round; but Lisa had come to be attached to it, and would have been sorry to leave it. For it was her home now, and a home where she was very happy—a home round which all sorts of bright and pleasant associations had gathered. She was fond and proud of it, too, as being her own—a place where she could do as she liked, and carry out all her little plans and fancies; and many were the small changes and improvements she had devised, until what was originally a house plainly furnished for letting, had become a really pretty place; the rooms filled with flowers, and birds, and books, and drawings, and the garden as gay as taste and care could make it.

That garden was her especial delight, for it was sheltered and private, with a magnificent view of the sea beyond, and close below a long reach of golden sand with a line of white breakers on it which she was never tired of watching, and the sound of whose waters ever rising and falling in measured cadence made perpetual music for her solitary hours. Never, too, was there such a garden as that for flowers. The borders were crowded with them, and the warm and sunny stone walk before the house had stands of greenhouse plants upon it filling up the spaces between the windows; while every nook and corner round had its rockery or old stump covered with trailing creepers. Flowers were Lisa's mania; her house as well as her garden was full of them, and every room was laden with their scent; vases standing on all the tables, and large pots in every window. She had, indeed, made a perfect bower of the place; and in this bower she was flitting about on the morning after Janet's return; very busy

apparently, though what she was doing would have been hard to tell. Trifling away her time, her aunt would have said, and perhaps she would have been right; but there was no one to find fault with her. So she went on amusing herself very much to her satisfaction—walking in and out of the window, feeding her birds and talking to them, arranging and re-arranging her flowers, and pausing every now and then to cast a wistful glance at Percy, who was still seated at the breakfast-table with the morning paper before him. He had been poring over its contents for some time, and perhaps she thought he had read it long enough; for when she had fidgeted about for nearly a quarter of an hour, looked at the clock very often, and stood for a few minutes as if making up her mind upon some undecided point, she stole across the room, and coming up to the back of his chair, roused him suddenly from his studies by throwing her arms round his neck, and half smothering him in her eager embrace.

‘My dear Lisa, what is it?’ he asked, as soon as he could speak. ‘You always treat me in that barbarous fashion when you want to get anything out of me. What is it now?’

‘I want you to put away that horrid paper. I’m sure you must know it by heart. Won’t you leave the rest till this evening?’

He smiled as he tossed it on a chair near. ‘There it goes, little woman. Is that all you want, or is there anything more? I suppose so, as you are hiding yourself there. Why don’t you come round where I can see you?’ drawing her from the back of his chair.

Lisa planted herself on his knee, and looked a little shy, as she did sometimes when preferring her requests; a kind of deference, perhaps, paid to his superior age and gravity; for she was perfectly aware that her wish was law, and that anything she liked to ask, whether reasonable or unreasonable, would be sure to be granted if it were within the range of possibility.

‘What is it, dearest?’ he asked again. ‘You want something, I am sure?’

‘Yes, I do,’ very busy twisting her fingers in the braid of his coat. ‘I want something very much; and I am wondering whether you will do it for me.’

‘Of course I will, dear, if I can. Is it anything to be done now?’

‘Well, not just this minute, exactly; but I should like to know about it. It’s something for next week; and I have been thinking of it ever since you told me last night you would have to go to Hoole. Can’t you guess what it is?’

‘Not at all; unless, indeed—perhaps you want to go and stay with Janet while I am away.’

Lisa made a face of considerable disgust. ‘Percy, how can you say such things! and when you know I don’t like her!’

‘No, but now Isabel and Nelly are there, it will be different. You would like being with them; and indeed, dear Lisa, I think it would be the best thing you could do. I don’t at all like the idea of leaving you here alone.’

‘No, that’s the very thing, Percy,’ and she hid her face on his shoulder; ‘I don’t want you to leave me. Why won’t you take me with you? it would make me so happy! I should be miserable here without you; and I don’t want to go to Lassell Lodge. Let me go with you, please,’ in a very coaxing tone.

Percy’s face fell at this request. ‘My dear Lisa, I wish I could. I would take you most willingly, if it were possible; but the fact is, it is simply out of the question. There is not a lodging near fit for you to go into. I asked about it yesterday; and every one told me it would never do to take a lady there.’

Lisa looked extremely disappointed; but it was only for a moment. Her face brightened again.

‘I dare say some people are a great deal more particular than I am,’ she said. ‘I shouldn’t care at all what sort of place I was in if I were with you, Percy; and I don’t take up much room—you might put me anywhere almost. I wouldn’t mind how uncomfortable I was. I should like any place if you would only let me go. Don’t you think you will? Don’t you think, at any rate, you are going to say you will think about it?’ looking at him with one of her most winning smiles.

He smiled a little too—stroking her bright hair fondly in the meantime. He did not see what good was to be done by thinking about it; but he could not say ‘no’ to her, and there was no harm in promising to do what he could.

‘Well, dear,’ he said after some consideration, ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do—I will go over this afternoon and have a look at the place; and if there’s any sort of a lodging to be had, I will take it for you. Only you must promise me not to be very much disappointed if I don’t succeed.’

'To be sure I will; and think it very good of you to have tried. I won't say I shan't *feel* disappointed, because I want to go with you; but I won't say anything about it. What time will you be back this evening, I wonder?'

'I don't know—not till late. I shall go directly I get away from the barracks, and you had better not expect me until you see me. You will have to make my excuses to Janet and the others, and tell them how it is. I can't put it off, as we go on Saturday.'

A reminder which made Lisa look very blank.

'O Percy! you must be sure and find some place for me. Fancy being away from you for a fortnight! What should I do? And you don't want to leave me either, do you? Don't you like having me with you? You tell me sometimes that I make a very nice little wife, and that you wouldn't part with me for anything. Isn't it true?'

'Yes, dearest, indeed it is. Ah, Lisa, if you knew half what you are to me! What should I do without you, my little summer-bird?'

'Summer-bird' was one of his pet names for her; and Lisa smiled.

'You are not going to do without me; when you want to do so, you mustn't make me so happy as I am now. Do you know, Percy, I wonder sometimes if there is anybody in the world so happy as we are. I don't believe there is. I am almost sorry Isabel and Nelly are here, and that we shan't be alone so much as we have been—our evenings especially have been so pleasant. We must make the most of our time while we are at Hoole.'

Percy looked at her anxiously. 'My dear Lisa, you are not going to build upon my being able to find any lodgings there? You have promised me you won't be disappointed if I don't. You will remember that?'

'No, of course not,' she said gaily; 'only I am sure you will, because you know how much I care about it.' But here the striking of the clock warned Percy that he ought to be off. With many injunctions to her to take care of herself, he went away; wondering in his own mind how she would take the disappointment which he felt certain was in store for her, and dreading nothing so much as to see a cloud upon the bright face which, ever since they had been married, it had been his

daily boast to himself had never once been crossed by even a passing shade of sadness.

Isabel and Elinor came down, as they had promised, to spend the day at the cottage, walking in between ten and eleven, and Janet with them; although the latter did not mean to stay—she would return in the evening, she said, with Arthur. Lisa told her of Percy's projected expedition, which seemed to entertain her greatly.

'He won't get any lodgings there,' she said. 'It is the most out-of-the-way place in the world. You are not obliged to go and bury yourself there, are you?'

'I am not obliged, but he is. They are going out surveying for some forts that are to be built there. He will often have to be away this summer, I am afraid; and he won't be back now for quite a fortnight. It is such an immense time to be alone, you know.'

'So it is,' said Janet, with a laugh. 'And so you thought of going after him, did you? But you won't be able; it is quite out of the question. It is the most miserable, out-of-the-way place imaginable. I have been there once or twice—driven through it, for it is rather pretty in that direction. It is close to the sea—quite a village, and a very lonely one too. As for getting lodgings there, you might as well look for them in the desert. It's nearly seven miles from any station, to begin with. How does Percy mean to get there?'

'I don't know—he didn't say. I suppose he'll go by train as far as he can, and walk the rest of the way.' And Lisa, who did not want to hear of any more difficulties in the way of the attainment of her wishes, dropped the subject; much to the displeasure of Isabel, who thought she treated very lightly any trouble Percy might have, so long as she could get her own way in what was apparently a mere fancy. She made no remark, however, and when Janet went away the topic was not renewed, Atherstone news being discussed instead; and then Lisa had the happiness of showing her new home to some one from the Priory. And if the place had been a palace, she could not have been prouder of it than she was; and the glee with which she went about displaying her treasures, and showing her many contrivances for making the cottage one of the pleasantest dwellings that could well be imagined, was pretty to see. She was proud of everything—of her garden with its beautiful

sea-view—of the house itself with its sheltering shrubs and overhanging creepers—of her little drawing-room with its tasteful arrangements, its ornaments and engravings, its flowers and books, its handsome piano—this last Percy's present to her when they had first returned from their wedding tour;—she was proud of all both within and without; and perhaps not the least proud of her own room, which, with its pale blue and white hangings, its pretty carpet and low couches, its cheval-glass and its dressing-table covered with all the appliances needful for a lady's toilette, formed no small contrast to her bare closet in the old house at Atherstone.

'Lane arranges all that for me,' she said, half apologetically, in answer to some remark of Isabel's as to much being by no means necessary. 'Lane arranges all that. She likes me to have things in that way, for she was used to it when—she lived with my mother,' she was about to have added; but something made her stop short, and for a moment there was a shade upon her face. But Elinor took up a set of coral ornaments that lay on the table and began admiring them, and she brightened up again.

'Yes, are they not pretty? Percy gave them me when we were in Paris. I like them better than anything I have; though he has given me a great many other things too;' opening her dressing-case as she spoke, and displaying with childish delight her various possessions—possessions so numerous, and some of them of so much value, that Isabel grew very grave as she looked. What had her brother been about to be so lavish in his expenditure on his idol? Surely he might have known that such things were far from suitable for his wife's age or station; and if any one but Lisa had been concerned, he would have been the first to see the folly of such extravagance. She stood in silent vexation, while her cousin displayed, and Elinor admired.

'I am almost afraid now to say I like a thing,' Lisa said, 'for he is sure to get it for me if he can. He is so very kind. I don't mean only in giving me things,' she added with a smile, 'but in every way. You don't know how very good he is! We are so happy.'

'And you never find it dull?' Elinor asked.

'No—yes,' she hesitated. 'A little, sometimes; the mornings are very long. I'm all alone then, you know; and though I work and practise, the time never goes very fast. But the afternoon makes up for everything. We go out then; sometimes

for a walk or a long drive into the country, and sometimes on the beach and sit among the rocks, and he reads to me. I like that—it's so pleasant to sit within sound of the waves, and listen to things one cares for. And in the evening I play to him, or else he reads to me again while I work. When we first came here we used to go out a great deal, but we don't now nearly so much; and I must say I like our home evenings the best. I like having Percy all to myself.'

Poor Lisa! the words came out innocently enough, but they were no sooner uttered than she saw she had made a mistake. Elinor, indeed, only laughed; but Isabel turned to the window and stood looking out with an air which told unmistakably what her thoughts were; and Lisa's momentary silence showed she had understood the movement. She closed her dressing-case hastily, and suggested a visit to Lane—a proposition to which Elinor at once acceded. Isabel, however, declined it. She was tired, she said; and instead of accompanying them she returned to the drawing-room, where she established herself with a book, and for the rest of the morning saw but little of her sister and cousin. She heard their voices about the garden, but although Lisa came in several times with an entreaty to her to join them, or an offer to come and sit with her, both were as often declined. She preferred being alone, she said; and alone she sat until some callers disturbed her solitude, and brought her cousin in from the garden to see them. But even then she did not exert herself to be agreeable; she was only intent upon watching Lisa, whose prettily shy manner and heightened colour, though in keeping with her extreme youth, were not what she would have wished to see in her brother's wife. They were too childish—not self-possessed enough; and yet even when criticising her cousin's want of womanliness, she blamed her still more for the approach to lightness and coquetry, which now, as often before, she thought she detected in her manner. But, prejudiced as she was, it was no wonder she did not understand Lisa; that she misconstrued into a lower motive her anxiety to please.

Lisa breathed a long sigh, which sounded very like one of relief, when her visitors were gone; and then she turned to her cousin.

'You are not well, Isabel, are you? Does your head ache?' she asked.



A rebuke to her for her unsociability Isabel considered the question, and she answered rather shortly, 'Not at all, thank you.'

'You are tired, then?'

'Not very—a little,' and she took up again the book she had been reading.

Lisa looked at her for a moment, and then she went away, but it was only to ask Lane to let them have some tea; and she came back so eager to wait upon her cousin, and so anxious for her to have everything just as she liked, that it was quite a pity Isabel should have appeared so little pleased. Later on in the afternoon, when her sister and cousin again went out for a walk on the beach, she once more declined to accompany them. This time, however, when left alone, she did not read. She sat, lost in thought, watching the deep swell of the sea, and the light upon the hills beyond the bay, the light from her own face fading away while she looked, and in its stead a darkness gathering—a reflection, perhaps, of the dark thoughts that filled her soul.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ANOTHER LINK IN THE CHAIN.

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening before Percy returned, and one glance at his face told Lisa he brought no good news. His search had been in vain; and, completely tired out, he had been obliged to return without being any nearer the attainment of his object than when he set out.

Weary as he was, however, he had no thought for anything but her disappointment; and when he saw the eager look with which she had come to meet him change at the first glance at his countenance, he felt a pang almost as bitter as if he were to

blame for his failure. She did not say a word, but the colour mounted to her face, and tears, the first he had seen since the day they left the Priory, rushed to her eyes. Her disappointment was grievous; nor was Janet's exclamation, 'I told you so, Lisa; I knew it was ridiculous trying,' at all calculated to lessen it.

'I am very sorry dearest,' he said. 'I did all I could, but it was useless; and really the place is such a hole that I should hardly like to have had you there even if I had found a lodging. But there are none to be had of any description. I did my best; I am sorry it has been of no use.'

'Never mind, Percy,' she said in a low voice, 'I won't care about it. Thank you for going, it was very kind of you; and if you couldn't find anything it can't be helped. I won't think of it again.'

'Thank you, dear.' He brightened up at the tone in which this was said; and sitting down on a sofa near, relapsed into silence. He was too tired apparently for conversation—so tired, indeed, that while Lisa was giving directions for a more substantial meal than they generally had at that hour, he fell fast asleep, with his head resting on his hand, looking, as Arthur remarked, 'for all the world as if he had been walking himself to death.'

'Yes, I think it was a pity, Lisa, you asked him to go,' said Isabel. 'You must have known how unlikely it was he would find lodgings in such a place as that. And if he had, there was the expense. You ought to have considered that, besides all the trouble you were giving him.'

Lisa was silent; she seemed to be engrossed with seeing how much tea she had put in the tea-pot.

'My dear Isabel, don't talk about what you don't understand,' said Arthur, sagely. 'Don't you know that if she asked for Cinderella's slipper, or the great Mogul's crown, he wouldn't think it too much trouble to set off in search of them. And as for expense—oh no, we never mention that. What husband would think of making objections on that score?'

'That is only nonsense, Arthur,' said Isabel, gravely. 'Lisa knows Percy's income is not large. And if he is inclined to indulge her, the more reason she should think twice before she asks for what she wants. You needn't make her more extravagant by those foolish speeches.'

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. 'If she's going to turn

extravagant, I don't think it will be my doing ;' with a significant glance at the sofa. 'Percy hasn't been waiting for me to put her up to it. He never says "no" to you, Lisa, does he? He is too wise for that. His maxim is, "Give a woman everything she asks for, and you will have peace in your house." It shall be mine too when I marry; my wife shall never have a wish ungratified.'

'Your means will have to be unlimited then,' said Isabel, drily. 'And all I can hope is, I may never have the pleasure of knowing her.'

'Indeed!' with an odd look. 'And why not? She will be a very charming person, I can tell you.'

'I doubt it. I think she will be exceedingly disagreeable. People who have their own way always are.'

'Hallo, Scaramouch, that's a hit at you. What a pity Le Balafré should let you make yourself such a nuisance!'

Lisa smiled at the recollections conjured up by that old name.

'How silly I was in those days!' she said, looking at Percy with very loving eyes.

'In what days?' asked Arthur.

'In what days! Why, when I knew nothing of him, and used to say those foolish things of him. I was very silly then.'

'You were? and now you are wiser, of course. You have altered your opinion. Plain men with black hair were your special detestation, I remember; and that Indian decoration which won him'——

Lisa coloured. 'You needn't remind me of all that, Arthur,' she said hastily. 'I was foolish then, but I know better now,' she added in a voice trembling with earnestness; 'and if I am proud of all these medals he wears, I am prouder still of that. It is the best and noblest of all, and I would not have him without it for worlds. My *dear* Le Balafré!' she exclaimed with great emphasis, and stooping down over the sofa where Percy was sitting, she pushed back his hair to kiss his forehead in her eager way—an action which woke him up, while Arthur's hearty laugh, and 'Well done, Lisa!' made him ask what was the matter.

'Only Lisa rhapsodising,' was the answer, while Isabel exclaimed impatiently, 'How silly of you, Lisa! What did you do that for? You might let him be quiet, when you see how tired he is.'

Lisa looked penitent. 'I'm very sorry—I didn't mean to wake him. But he couldn't have slept much longer, for tea is just ready, and I'm sure he wants that; and then he can sleep as long as he likes, and I won't disturb him again.'

'I had no business to be asleep at all,' Percy remarked; 'you were quite right to wake me up. I'm sure I beg everybody's pardon for being so rude;' he looked at Janet, who, however, only laughed; while Isabel, who still appeared vexed, repeated that 'Lisa might have known better, it was just like her—she was so thoughtless.'

'Thoughtless, is she?' said Percy, turning to his little wife, whose bright eyes were dimmed at this accusation. 'That is a mistake, Isabel. I don't know that I ever met with any one who has so much thought; it is an old head on young shoulders sometimes, isn't it, Lisa?' he added smiling.

'That was only when you were ill,' said Lisa sorrowfully. 'You used to tell me then how thoughtful I was; but I am not always. Isabel is right, I am afraid; I am *very* careless.'

'Are you, dearest? I don't think so. Isabel was not here when I was ill; and all I hope for her is, that when she wants a nurse, she will get one as good as you.'

Lisa looked very bright again. 'Yes, you liked having me to take care of you, didn't you? And I liked doing it too. I was so glad you were not alone without anybody to look after you; you would have been so dull.'

'So I should; instead of being just the contrary. For that was the best of you, Lisa—you were always smiling and cheerful, and yet you must often have been tired enough, little woman.'

'Was I? No; I don't think so. I was too happy taking care of you to be tired. I was afraid at first you would miss Mary, and want her with you; but you didn't, and I was very glad. I am the proper person to do everything for you now, you know.'

And she seemed so happy with this thought, that she forgot the momentary vexation caused by her cousin's remarks. For the short remainder of the time Isabel was at the cottage that evening, she was very grave and silent; and she was the first to propose the return of their party to Lassell Lodge, hurrying Janet by representing how tired Percy looked—she was sure he would be glad to be alone. Her last look back, as they went down the road, brought no pleasant thoughts to her disturbed

mind ; for it showed her her brother's tall figure standing out against the light that streamed through the open door, while Lisa was beside him, with both her hands clasped on his arm, and her face raised to his, with such a winning smile, as might well excuse the admiration with which he stood regarding her. Isabel's sigh as she looked was a very long one, and during the walk home she had not a word to say.

She was sitting alone in the drawing-room at Lassell Lodge on the following afternoon, when Percy walked in. Lisa was not with him ; he had only just returned from the barracks, he said ; but having met Janet and Nelly, and been told by them that he would find her in, he had come up to see her about something he wished to propose. He wanted her to stay at the cottage with Lisa while he was away. Janet, he was sure would have no objection, as her visit to Gainsford was to be a long one, and she would have plenty of time to give to Lassell Lodge afterwards.

'And I am very anxious Lisa should have some one with her,' he said. 'She will find it lonely, poor child, all by herself ; and although she would of course see you every day, that is not the same thing as having you in the house with her. I should like you very much, Isabel, to go down for a fortnight. It would be pleasant for both of you, I am sure. You have no objection, I suppose ?' looking at her with a smile.

But Isabel looked grave, and did not raise her eyes from the drawing before her.

'I thought I heard Janet proposing last night she should come to us while you are away,' she said. 'It seems to me that would be a much better plan than my going there.'

'Yes, so it might, if she wished it ; but she does not. She would rather stay at the cottage.'

Isabel did look up now with some surprise expressed in her face.

'You don't give in to all Lisa's whims and fancies, Percy, do you ? Why should she object to come here ?'

There was something in her tone which seemed to strike her brother disagreeably.

'You are mistaken, Isabel. Lisa is not given to whims and fancies—no one less so. But they are very gay here, as you know—a great deal too gay for her just now. She wants to be quiet, and I wish it for her myself.'

‘Oh ! if you wish it, that is a different thing,’ and Isabel took up her pencil again. ‘Did she propose my going?’

‘No, she said nothing about it. She is so taken up, poor child, with the thought of my going, that she has had no time yet to think of what she is to do all alone. I did not even tell her I meant to ask you to keep her company. I thought I would see you first and settle it ; and it would be a pleasant surprise for her.’

Isabel was silent—engrossed apparently with a rubbing-out process.

‘It is better for her to have a companion on every account,’ Percy went on, after a moment’s pause. She is too young and pretty to be left alone, and of course she cannot shut herself up. You are the very person to be with her, Isabel ; and I felt quite glad, when I knew I had to go, to think you were here.’

‘Your best plan will be to find out first from Lisa whether she will like to have me,’ was the answer, in rather a constrained voice. ‘It is quite possible it may be anything but the pleasure to her that you seem to think.’

Percy set down the ornament he was handling, and looked at her.

‘What do you mean ? I don’t understand you.’

‘I only mean what I say—that Lisa may not be glad to have me with her. I am afraid I have not the happy knack of pleasing her. Perhaps I speak a little too plainly ; and as she is accustomed to have her own way, she does not like that. I would rather not make the arrangement till you have asked her.’

Percy was silent for a few moments ; and when he spoke again it was in a voice as constrained as her own.

‘There is no need to ask Lisa about it. You don’t wish it yourself, I suppose?’

Isabel played with her pencil, and for a minute seemed doubtful what her answer should be.

‘Well, as you ask me, Percy, I must say I don’t wish it,’ she replied at last, with some hesitation. ‘I am quite sure it will be no pleasure to either of us. You know, when I see things I don’t like, I can’t help speaking out ; and Lisa often takes offence, and considers me unkind when I mean nothing of the sort. And then, too, we are not much of companions—we never were. Our tastes don’t assimilate in the least ; she is so much of a child, that I find it difficult to know how to adapt myself to her.’

Percy's brow was overclouded. 'Certainly, if my wife is so little of a companion as you make out, the less you see of her the better. I would not for worlds have her with any one who thought slightly of her. Good-bye.'

He caught up his cap, and would have been off in a moment had she not stopped him. She rose from her chair with an imploring look.

'Percy, don't quarrel with me about Lisa,' she exclaimed beseechingly. 'Why is she always to make misunderstandings between us? We were happy together before she came to separate us, and why should we disagree now because we don't think alike about her? Why should you quarrel with me for not being able to think her perfection, as you do?'

'I don't wish you to think her anything of the sort, Isabel; but I must say I did wish you to think kindly of her, and to love her. I hoped you would—that for my sake, if not for her own, you would have felt for her as a sister. I never thought you would have kept up that foolish prejudice you had at the time of our marriage.'

Isabel coloured. 'We think differently, Percy. I did not consider it a foolish prejudice, nor do I now. For Lisa is not altered; she is just the same as she was then—just as little of a woman, and just as light and trifling. My opinion of her is not changed, and of course my objections are the same.'

'I thought your objections then were, that she was not suited to me, and would not make me happy; and when you see she does, I think it is time for you to change your opinion and own yourself mistaken. And as for her being a child, she can't help that. It is not her fault that she is only seventeen instead of five-and-twenty; and when you expect your tastes and amusements to be the same, you forget the eight years' difference between you. Instead of complaining of her want of congeniality, why not try whether you could not make her take an interest in the things you care for? Or if you don't want to take that trouble, surely it would not have been a great hardship to suit yourself for one fortnight to her tastes, and make the poor child happy in her own way. She is not one to think little of kindness, and I cannot imagine you would have found her so difficult to get on with as you seem to fancy.'

'If you wish it'—— Isabel began, with something of an effort.

‘I don’t. I don’t wish you to do anything that is disagreeable to you; and as you say it would be no pleasure to Lisa, most certainly I would rather you should not make the arrangement. Nelly will not have the same objections, I daresay.’

And as Elinor at that moment happened to come in with Janet and Arthur, Isabel drew back, and while the proposition was being made to her sister, sat down again to her drawing, but with a flush upon her face which betokened no little disturbance of mind. The others were too busy talking to notice her; the only remark made upon her refusal being one from Janet to the effect that she was glad she had declined, for she could not spare her then—she had had an invitation from some friends that very morning to spend a week or two with them, and she wanted Isabel to go with her; she had only hesitated about accepting it because she could not take both her and Elinor; but if the latter went to the cottage, it would all be settled at once; and Nelly, who upon being first appealed to had coloured and hesitated, now raised her eyes, and having looked round the room, and apparently discovered in one of the corners something to bring her to a decision, said she thought it would be very nice—she should like to stay with Lisa exceedingly. And so it was decided.

‘And an awful shame it is!’ said Arthur, with an air of profound melancholy. ‘Here have you three hardly been in the house two days, when you are all talking of going off again; and Ralph and I are to be condemned to our former state of morose taciturnity. Really this house ought to be called the “deserted home.” What will Ralph say, Janet, to your making a bachelor of him again so soon? I expect he’ll be feeling injured.’

‘Not at all. I believe he likes my being away quite as well as if I were here. He gets on just as well without me. Besides, I am not going yet; only I want Isabel to go with me when I do go, so she must not tie herself to Lisa.’

‘Ah, well, what must be, must. I shall come down to the cottage sometimes, Nelly, to see how you and Lisa are getting on; and the rest of the time, I shall sit among the ivy on the garden-wall and play mournful airs on the flute. You will find me, when you return, reduced to a shadow, and’——

‘And a confirmed rheumatic subject, I should think, for that ivy is very damp,’ said Janet, cutting him short; and then turning to Percy, ‘Well, Nelly shall come to you on Saturday. What time do you go?’



And arrangements being finally made, Percy went away, nothing more passing between him and Isabel. She hardly looked up as he left the room ; and her good-bye was in a very indifferent voice. But whether she were quite so unconcerned as she wished to appear was doubtful ; for, after he was gone, saying something about having a bad headache, she disappeared, and was seen no more for the rest of the afternoon.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE POOL AMONG THE HILLS.

‘PERCY, it’s a glorious afternoon ! You haven’t forgotten your promise, have you ?’

‘What, to take you for a drive ? No, indeed I have not, and the carriage is to be here at three ; it is nearly that now.’

Lisa possessed herself of his hand, to give it a very tight squeeze. ‘Thank you, Percy : you are so kind. You don’t know how I have been thinking of it all morning ; and it will be so lovely in the country to-day ! Here—take this great heavy thing !’ and she unfastened his sword, which she had buckled round her waist, and which had been trailing on the ground as she walked. ‘I’ll go and get ready now.’ And away she went, with her light step and joyous face, singing gaily.

‘It’s just the day for the country !’ she said to herself as she stood at her window tying on her bonnet. ‘How the sun sparkles on the sea, and how hot it looks ! If we can get as far as the woods, it will be delightfully cool and green there ! Dear me, how happy I am ! I wish everybody else was the same ! If only Percy were not going to-morrow ! But I won’t think of that—I’ll be happy while I can. I wonder where my gloves are !’ And being still at an age which possesses the faculty of

looking forward very little beyond the present moment, she became absorbed in a search for the missing articles; tumbling over all the things in her drawers as she did so, in a way that showed that Lisa Tennent was not much altered from the Lisa Kennedy of old. 'Lane will be very cross when she finds what a mess I've made here; but I can't help it.—Oh, here they are! And there's the carriage!' And hearing the sound of carriage-wheels coming up to the house, she flung everything back, and catching up her gloves, went off again, leaving no little confusion behind her. But who could stay to be orderly on such a bright May day? Not Lisa, certainly. As she went down-stairs singing again, she had not a thought for anything beyond the pleasure of the next two or three hours; and past and future lectures from Lane on untidy habits were forgotten, together with plenty of good resolutions of her own on the same subject.

What a pleasant drive that was! She had had many pleasant ones in the neighbourhood of Gainsford, but none to equal this. How green the early leaves looked, and how beautiful the corn-fields and meadows were! and when on their road home again, after a long drive over hill and down, they came to a wood of beech and silver birch trees which reminded her of some place near Copelands, she was in an ecstasy; while the wild flowers which covered the high banks threw her into raptures. She could not sit still any longer, but insisted on getting out, that she might fill her hands with the anemones, bluebells and other beauties of the woods; and the carriage-seat was soon filled with her treasures.

'This is Arthur's road every day,' Percy remarked as they walked on together. 'The Warren is not half a mile off; it lies just down there.'

'Does it? Perhaps we shall see him then: isn't this about the time he leaves? O Percy, how pretty! Do look at the shadows there!'

They stood upon the edge of a broad pool of water, which, half in sunshine, half in shade, stretched far away into the recesses of the wood. The breezes played upon its surface, and the clear light from above looked down into the dreamy darkness of its centre depths; only under its steep banks, overgrown with long rank grass and tangled brushwood, stillness and shadow lay; and the old trees that drooped over it with their gnarled and twisted boughs, made those shadows the more pro-

found. Lisa was struck by the silence and solitude of the spot almost as much as by its loveliness.

'How beautiful it is!' she exclaimed. 'And how wild! Who would believe it was so close to the road!—though I suppose many people don't come this way? Or does it lead to any other place besides the Warren?'

'No, only there, and out into the highroad again. This is part of the Crawford property: they have a great deal in the neighbourhood.'

'Have they? Well, it's a lovely place, but very dreary,' looking at the dark water before her. 'Not now—I don't mean by daylight—it is only wild and beautiful now; but by night—I shouldn't like to come here then. I could fancy all sorts of dreadful things done here in the darkness!'

Percy smiled. 'What have you to do with darkness, summer-bird?' he said lightly. 'You were made for light and sunshine, not for the night. Here—sit down on this stone and rest yourself,' fetching a shawl from the carriage as he spoke. 'You will find it a very pleasant seat; unless, indeed, you are afraid of that black-looking water,' seeing her eyes still fixed upon it.

She smiled then. 'Not with you here,' she said as she sat down. 'We will wait for Arthur, shall we? We have plenty of time to spare, and it will be quite a pleasant surprise to him to find us here. We can all go back together.'

And for some time while they sat there talking she watched, as far as she could see among the trees, the road by which her cousin must come. Arthur, however, did not make his appearance. A horseman passed them, but it was not he; and having gone to meet him in the full expectation of seeing her cousin, she returned a good deal disappointed to her husband's side.

'Who was it?' Percy asked, noticing her heightened colour as she came back.

'Only Mr Thorpe.' She sat down again, and produced her sketch-book and pencil. 'I made sure it was Arthur.'

'Did you speak to him?'

'No, we only bowed. Isn't that a lovely peep there—where the water turns, and the woods seem to grow over it! I want to try and take it before that light goes, it is so pretty.' And she set to work forthwith, though Percy told her she was too near, and he did not think she would make anything of it.

‘Never mind—I’ll try. I always like to see what I can do, when you tell me I can’t manage a thing.’ And for some time she appeared intent upon her drawing; while he watched her, thinking what a pretty picture she herself would make, as she sat there, with the afternoon sunlight playing round her and the green boughs waving over her head. She raised her head at last.

‘Do you remember this day last year?’ she said, holding her drawing some little distance from her, and contemplating her performance with a critical eye.

‘This day last year?—no. What happened then? anything particular?’

‘Yes, something very particular, to me at least—not to you; but still I thought you might have recollected one thing we did. It was the first time I went out after I hurt my foot. Don’t you remember now? You took me out in the carriage with Mary, and gave me my first lesson in sketching.’

‘Ah, yes, we went to Copelands. I remember how pleased you were to get over there again, Lisa.’

‘How pleased to get out anywhere again. And that was the day you gave me Prince—dear little Prince,’ looking at her dog, who was sniffing daintily at a mouse-hole near. ‘I thought it very kind of you—particularly kind; because I had always been so exceedingly rude to you. And in the evening Mrs Daly came in. You don’t know, perhaps, that it was then, Percy, I really began to like you—not a little only, but very much. I had begun, before that, to think you not quite so disagreeable as I did at first; but still I didn’t care much about you one way or the other. But that day—oh, I remember it so well! I was so sorry then I had ever been so silly—so wicked as to dislike you because’——

‘Because I was so unfortunately plain—such a disagreeable-looking fellow.’

‘O Percy! Well, it don’t matter what I thought of you then—you don’t mind it, do you, now you know I think so differently? But, oh dear, how strange it all seems to me! If anybody had told me then what would happen in a few months, I should never have believed them! I began to like you very much from that day; but it was only as a cousin; I never dreamed of your ever being anything else. If any one had said then, that one day you were to be my own dear husband, who was to be so good to me, and spoil me, and make me so happy—eh, Percy!’ looking at

him in her shy way, and with a very pretty colour—‘why, I should have said it was all rubbish! I couldn’t have believed it, could I?’

‘Not any more than I could have believed it, Lisa. Even now, do you know, I have a fancy at times that it must be a mistake. I can’t imagine how you could make up your mind to care for me,’ looking again as he spoke at the very lovely girlish face at his side.

‘Percy, what a speech from a husband to his wife! But I see you are smiling, and I know why you say it. You only want to hear me tell you how very much I do care for you; and I am not going to tell you anything of the sort: I have said it so many, many times, that I never mean to say it again.’ Lisa’s eyes, however, were very eloquent; there was no need of words to tell what her thoughts were. ‘People never say those kind of things, you know, when they have been married a long time, as we have: I feel quite an old married woman now.’

‘You do, do you?’

‘Yes, really. And now what do you think of that? It will turn out better than you thought, won’t it? I shall have to finish it at home, though, for I’m sure it is time we were going now; look, how long the shadows are getting! and we have to dine at Lassell Lodge this evening!’ getting up as she spoke. ‘I wonder what makes Arthur so late to-day: we shall miss him, after all.’

‘Yes, but it can’t be helped. Come, dear, we have no time to lose;’ and Prince having been summoned from his investigation of all the mouse-holes in the neighbouring bank, they took their seat in the carriage and set off home; Lisa leaning back, and enjoying to the utmost the rapid drive and the fresh wind that blew about them. They were within two miles of Gainsford, when her attention was attracted by something at a short distance before them.

‘Why, there he is!’ she exclaimed, ‘and—how very odd!’

‘What is odd?’ Percy asked. ‘Who is it?’

‘Why, Arthur. And who is that with him?—he is walking, leading his horse. And there’s a lady; it looks like—yes,’ as they got nearer, ‘it is—it’s Nelly, I declare! What can she be doing so far from home?’

They drove on, and in a minute or two overtook the pair, who turned round upon hearing a carriage stopping beside them;

Arthur smiling, Elinor looked disturbed and fluttered ; and her start, when her name was called, made Lisa laugh.

‘ Ah, you may well ask what we are doing ! ’ Arthur said, in answer to their inquiries. ‘ But the fact is, I’ve been playing the part of champion to this young lady—rescuing her from a mad bull, *alias* a very quiet cow, that was looking at her over a hedge. She was in such a state of alarm at the creature’s hostile proceedings, that if I had not appeared when I did, we should have had a coroner’s inquest to-morrow, and a verdict “ Died of fright ” returned.’

There was a laugh at Elinor’s expense ; in which, however, she did not join.

‘ But where were you going, Nelly ? ’ Lisa asked. ‘ It is such a long way from the Lodge.’

‘ She came out for a walk,’ said Arthur, ‘ and lost her way, of course. She’s no topographist, and never has an idea whether she ought to steer east, west, north, or south. And then she has a horror of anything in the shape of a dog or cow ; and if she only sees the tip of a tail, or hears a bark half a mile off, she’s off like a shot to be out of the way. It’s no wonder she finds herself astray sometimes—eh, Nelly ? ’ he said carelessly.

Elinor coloured a little, but made no answer ; and Lisa turned to Arthur, to ask how it was they had not seen him before, telling him of their having waited for him in the wood near the Warren.

‘ I didn’t come that way this afternoon ; I came by the lower road, and a lucky thing for Nelly I did, or I don’t know how she could have got out of her dilemma. And now she’s tired to death : you had better give her a lift as far as the Lodge gate. I tried to persuade her to mount Chestnut, but she was horrified at the proposal.’

So room was made for Elinor in the carriage, and in due time she was set down at Lassell Lodge, and left to make her way up to the house with Arthur, while the other two returned to the cottage before coming up again for the evening.

‘ What a delightful afternoon we have had ! ’ Lisa exclaimed, as they stopped at their own door : ‘ I’ve been so happy, so very happy ! ’

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE FIRST SHADOW

PERCY was away longer than he expected—the fortnight being nearly three weeks—and the ‘merry month of May’ was almost out when he came back. It was a warm and really summer’s afternoon when he once more walked in at his own gate, pleasing himself with the idea of taking Lisa by surprise; for it was an hour or two earlier than he had told her he should get in.

The house was quiet—very quiet—as he let himself in with his latch-key, and for a moment the silence struck him as something almost ominous. But he smiled at himself immediately afterwards for his own fancifulness. He had never come home before unmet, and it was Lisa’s missing step and voice which made the place seem so deserted. But she was not far off, of course; and he walked on into the drawing-room, where he made sure of finding her.

But she was not there. The room was empty; though from the appearance of the books and work lying about, it was evident it had been recently used. Very homelike it looked, but it was very still; and the closed green blinds, keeping out the glare of the afternoon sun, seemed to deepen almost into gloom the shaded quietness of the place. The very birds were half asleep in their cages, and hardly gave him a chirp as he passed; and even the flowers looked pale and drooping; though without all was life and sunshine. He could catch glimpses of light on the blue waters, and hear the sound of the waves upon the shore, and the breeze among the acacia and laburnum trees in the garden; and once he paused, thinking he heard Lisa’s voice too; but when he listened, there was nothing but the wind and the humming of the bees in the creepers above the window.

‘Perhaps she is out,’ was his disappointed reflection, ‘or is she in the garden?’ And as he stood for a moment at the window, he heard the sound of voices, and thought he saw the flutter of a dress under a tree upon the lawn.

He was not mistaken : it was Lisa herself who was sitting there—but not Elinor with her, as he expected. It was a man's voice that met his ear as he walked towards the spot, and he recognised it as that of his cousin Arthur, even before he made out his figure by Lisa's side. Very deep in conversation they both were ; he bending forward, making holes in the ground with his stick as he talked, and she looking down too, and answering in low earnest tones ; and although her words were inaudible, her voice gave Percy the idea that she was in distress. So intent were they both on what they were saying, that his step upon the grass was unheard.

'Lisa!' and as he spoke she started and looked round. Was it only fancy that made him think that start less than of delighted surprise than of alarm—that she was more frightened than pleased at his sudden appearance?

'Why, Lisa, my darling, have you nothing to say to me? Are you not going to let me look at you, my little summer-bird? I did not frighten you, did I?'

'Not frighten me, exactly. But you startled me. I wasn't expecting you,' she murmured.

'No, indeed,' said Arthur, who had risen hastily with her ; 'of course we were not. You told her you wouldn't be home till seven. I wonder you have the conscience to come stalking down upon her in that style.'

'I am sorry I startled her so much,' Percy said, a little gravely. 'I thought you would be pleased to see me, dearest, whether you expected me or not. You are not sorry, are you?'

'Sorry ! O Percy !' But whether it were that his tone implied reproach, or from some other cause, she suddenly burst into tears—a proceeding which caused him no little consternation—while Arthur gave a long whistle, and thinking he was better out of the way, walked off towards the house.

The sound of his retreating steps seemed to recal Lisa to herself, but she had no reason to give for her distress, unless it might be that she thought she was very tired. She had walked a good deal that morning, and it had been rather hot, and—she was very glad he had come home ; with which wind-up she broke off rather abruptly.

'But what was Nelly about to let you do such foolish things?' he asked. 'I thought she was here to take care of you. Where is she?'



Lisa's face flushed a little. 'I think she is in her own room lying down; she said at luncheon that she had a bad headache.'

'Oh, you both did too much, then? Where did you go to tire yourselves so much?'

'We were only on the sands. Shall we go in? it's very hot here.'

They walked back to the house; and when they reached the drawing-room, she threw herself on the sofa, and Percy heard a very long sigh as she did so. It was evident she had over-fatigued herself; and vexed that she had done so, he insisted on her remaining where she was, and would not even hear of her getting up for dinner.

'She has tired herself out,' he remarked that evening to Janet, who was noticing that she looked very pale. 'She walked too much this morning, she tells me. You should not have gone so far with her, Nelly,' he added, turning to his sister. 'I trusted to you to look after her while I was away.'

'Elinor looks as tired herself,' said Janet. 'How could you be so silly, Nelly? Where did you go to knock yourselves up?'

Elinor raised her eyes from the work over which she was bending, and looked as if she had not heard what was said to her.

'I am not tired,' she said, when Janet repeated her question. 'I haven't been out at all to-day, and I didn't know Lisa had.'

Percy looked surprised. 'I thought I understood, Lisa, that you had both been out together,' he said. 'Surely you told me so. You would never have been walking alone?' in a strangely cold, hurt voice.

'Walking in her sleep, perhaps,' suggested Arthur, who was watching her varying colour with some uneasiness. 'Not that it would matter much that I can see, if she did go for a stroll; it would only be on the sands, and they are quiet enough in the morning. Don't be such a tyrant, Percy, as to grudge her a quiet walk if she likes to take one.'

Percy drew himself up, looking formidably tall, and very proud, as he did sometimes when he thought himself unwarrantably interfered with.

'I have no wish to act the part of a tyrant,' he said, coldly, 'though I have my wishes upon some subjects, and Lisa knows what they are. I am sorry she should have thought proper to disregard them.'

Arthur gave a shrug, muttering something about no harm being meant ; but Lisa was silent, though her colour came and went, and she looked very nervous.

‘You surely didn’t think of going out alone, when you know Percy does not like it?’ remarked Isabel, in a low tone. ‘Why, Lisa! what could make you do such a thing? Where did you go?’

Lisa looked uneasy.

‘I was on the sands ; I walked there for some time.’

‘Alone ! O Lisa !’

There was a volume of reproach in the tone ; but no answer was made. Only Lisa’s lip quivered, and she glanced nervously at Percy. Happily for her, there came a diversion ; for Arthur, who was fidgeting about the room, contrived, in his passage between two tables, to throw down a stand, on which was a bowl of gold and silver fish. The crash of the shattered glass, and the deluge of water on the floor, startled everybody.

‘O Arthur!’ and Lisa started from the sofa ; while Elinor, who had received half the contents of the bowl over her dress, jumped up too, with a shriek.

‘Very sorry!’ said Arthur, but not looking at all so. On the contrary, he appeared very much relieved at the catastrophe, and went about picking up the fish by their tails, with a smile on his face, which not all his efforts to be grave and penitent could repress. Lisa would have helped him, but Percy stopped her peremptorily.

‘Lie still, Lisa,’ he said gravely, putting her back on the sofa. ‘There is no need for you to trouble yourself about it.’

He rang the bell, and Lisa lay still as she was told, while the servant who was summoned cleared away the broken glass and wiped up the water ; and the fish having been provided with temporary accommodation, and Elinor having retired to change her dress, things were restored to order, and everybody began to talk again. Only Percy was absent, and imperturbably grave ; and Lisa seemed to see no one but him : while Isabel was highly indignant at what had passed ; nor was her displeasure lessened by Arthur’s ill-timed interference. She even began to imagine there was some understanding between him and Lisa. The supposition was confirmed a little later, when, under the shelter of some loud conversation, she heard him remark to her in a low voice—

‘A lucky downfall that for us, Scaramouch. But what a little goose you are! What makes you look so frightened?’ And then followed something which made Lisa shake her head.

‘I can’t, Arthur; indeed I can’t. And you promised’—she was beginning in a tone of remonstrance, when, meeting Isabel’s eye, she coloured deeply, and became suddenly silent. Arthur, too, observed he was watched, and retreating to the piano, occupied himself there until Janet thought proper to move, which she did shortly afterwards.

Percy sat up very late that night writing; and when he went up-stairs, it was between one and two o’clock. Supposing Lisa to be asleep, he was passing through her room with some caution, on his way to his own dressing-room, when to his surprise he heard his name called. He was startled, thinking something was the matter.

‘What is it, Lisa? Are you not well?’ and he was at her side directly; all coldness of manner vanishing at once in his anxiety.

‘Yes, I am quite well.’ She gave a long sigh as she spoke. ‘I want to say something to you, Percy. Put that candle away, please.’

He did as he was asked, setting it down upon a table near, but something of his stiffness had returned when he came back.

‘You don’t mean to say you have been waiting for me all this time?’ he said, in rather a constrained voice.

‘Yes; and it has seemed so long. I thought you were never coming. But I couldn’t go to sleep while you were angry with me.’ She looked at him with her wistful beseeching eyes, and he could not resist their pleading. His arm was round her in a moment.

‘Lisa, my darling, why did you do it, when I asked you not?’

It was said very much as if he were speaking to some wilful child; and her close, clinging embrace was after the same fashion. But she did not attempt any reply.

‘You are not angry with me, are you?’ she said; and she shivered as if the fear of his displeasure chilled her.

‘No, dearest, no;’ the idea of feeling anger or anything else that was harsh towards one so lovely and loving, seeming to him then impossible. ‘No, dearest, I am not angry; I was a little vexed, and you can’t wonder at it, Lisa. There are

not many things I keep you from. I thought you would not have minded pleasing me in this.'

There was a choking sob from Lisa, but she kept it back, only clinging still closer to him.

'And you won't be angry with me again? You are not now?' in a broken voice. 'O Percy! don't look at me again as you did this evening,' she said imploringly.

He kissed her tenderly, beginning to look upon himself as having been nothing less than tyrannical and unjust.

'Poor child, how cold you are!' he said. 'But you must forget it, Lisa. Don't think of it any more. I don't like to see you looking so pale and tired—you will make yourself ill. Lie down, my darling, and forget it.'

He laid her down himself, trying to soothe her with all sorts of endearing words. And if, as he sat holding her hand in his till she fell asleep, the thought crossed his mind that her conduct had not been exactly what he should have expected, he would not dwell upon it. She was wilful sometimes, he knew; it was in her nature. And then his thoughts went back to the Priory—to the hundred and one ways in which, when he had first known her, she had tormented him by her caprice and waywardness. How pretty she had looked in those wilful moods, which, indeed, had won his heart. Yes, he should not like to have her different, even though she might sometimes choose to carry out her own wishes in opposition to his. She would not do it without being sorry for it afterwards; and if she were pretty in her waywardness, she was even more so in her penitence, he thought, looking at the pale sweet face before him and the long eyelashes fringed with tears. And he kissed the little hand that had been lying in his, and went away to forget there had been anything between them, or that he had had cause to imagine he was not satisfied with her.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

## ISABEL'S SUSPICIONS.

'WELL, Lisa, how are you this morning?' asked Janet, with a smile, as she came into the drawing-room at the cottage on the following day.

Lisa was alone, sitting on a low stool near the open window. The sunlight, which was playing on tree and shrub without, found its way through overshadowing boughs into the pleasant room where she sat among her birds and flowers; and light breezes came wandering by, bringing with them the murmur of the far-off waves, and many scents and sounds of summer. But she was looking pale and harassed; and the expression of her face struck at once both Janet and Isabel.

'Is anything the matter?' the former asked again. 'You look very woe-begone.'

Lisa coloured a little. 'Do I? I didn't know it. I was only thinking. Nelly is very poorly this morning.'

'Is she? What is the matter with her?'

'Not much, I daresay,' remarked Isabel, drily. 'A headache, or something else equally alarming. Nelly is always glad of an excuse for lying in bed.'

'It isn't only a headache,' Lisa said; 'I'm afraid she is really ill.'

'Poor Lisa,' said Janet. 'She is quite anxious.' And a laughing conversation followed, on the subject of some of Elinor's fancies—a conversation in which Lisa took no part. She sat looking anxious and preoccupied.

'How very odd you are this morning, Lisa!' Janet said again. 'What is come to you? It can't be only Nelly. Oh, I know, somebody has been scolding you about that unlucky walk of yours. I hope he was not *very* angry.'

Lisa looked uncomfortable. 'Percy never scolds me,' she said, quickly.

'Never!' said Janet, with a smile. 'Are you sure he didn't last night? He looked black enough to administer any amount

of lecturing. If Ralph ever looked like that at me, and for such a silly thing too'—

'Janet! Mrs Darrell!' Lisa fired up in a moment.

'What is the matter?' asked Janet, in astonishment.

'Only that you are not to speak of Percy in that way, if you please.'

'Oh!' Janet was evidently offended.

'I beg your pardon,' Lisa said, more quietly. 'Only—you know I must not—I can't hear it—and'—

'Just as you please,' returned Janet, coolly. 'I didn't mean anything so dreadful; you needn't look so hot and angry.'

There was no answer. Lisa looked more inclined to cry than anything else just then; and for a minute or two there was an awkward silence. Then Isabel rising said she would go and see her sister. She went accordingly, and found Elinor in bed, as Lisa had told her, complaining of giddiness and a great deal of pain in her head. She was evidently far from well; but Isabel did not think much of her indisposition, looking upon it as merely a slight feverish attack, of which, as usual, she was inclined to make the most.

She was going down-stairs, on her way to the drawing-room again, when, her boot-lace happening to break, she stopped for a minute to fasten it, and while doing so, heard voices in the hall below. It was Arthur who was speaking, and although she could not hear what he said, she was struck by a change in his voice, which had something in it so earnest, so unlike his usual light carelessness, that for a moment she wondered whom he could be addressing. What could he want, and who was with him? The latter doubt was soon solved, for Lisa spoke in answer.

'Well, Arthur, I will promise then,' she said with a sigh. 'I won't ask it again—I will wait till'—

The rest was lost; for she moved as she spoke, but there were thanks from Arthur in return, and once more Isabel was struck by that change in his tone—that difference from his ordinary easy, offhand way with his old playfellow.

Lost in thought she remained standing on the stairs until the closing of the house door roused her from her reverie. Then she finished fastening up her boot-lace and went down into the hall. At the foot of the stairs she came upon Lisa, who was

leaning against the banisters, with her head resting on her hands. She started when she heard her cousin's voice.

'O Isabel!' she said, in some confusion; 'I didn't hear you coming. Janet is not gone yet—she is waiting for you.'

She did not pause to have any questions asked, but turned quickly and went back to the drawing-room, where Janet, who did not seem to have been aware of her absence, was sitting absorbed in a book of engravings. Some more conversation followed, during which Isabel was unusually thoughtful and silent, and then she and Janet said good-bye and went away.

They were all sitting at the breakfast-table the following morning, when a note was brought in and given to Isabel.

'From Lisa,' she remarked as she opened it. 'What a sad scrawl it is! But she always does write in such a hurry.'

There was some excuse this time for the 'sad scrawl,' for it had been penned in evident distress. Elinor was very ill; she had been taken so much worse in the night that they had been obliged to send for a medical man. Nothing was mentioned, however, of the nature of her illness; and Isabel, when she had read the note, turned it over, and looked at it again in evident vexation.

'Just like Lisa, to give no particulars!' she exclaimed. 'I wonder what it is. Nothing very bad, I daresay, but it is very provoking.'

'Very,' returned Janet. 'What do you mean to do?'

'Go down at once,' Isabel answered, getting up as she spoke. 'That will be the best thing.'

'And stay when you are there,' Janet remarked. 'That is what Percy will want you to do, you may be sure. Of course he won't wish his wife to have all the nursing, so you must make up your mind to stay and be useful to her.'

Isabel looked annoyed. 'If I stay, it will be to make myself useful to Elinor,' she said gravely. 'But I shall see whether it is really necessary. I daresay it will not be.' She was passing Arthur on her way out of the room, when he stopped her.

'Let me look at that note,' he said, holding out his hand for it.

'You have heard it all, there is nothing more in it.' She gave it him, however; and while she was still standing talking to Janet, he read it over several times, and then sat for some minutes in deep thought.

'You will be late, won't you?' she said at last, as she turned round and found him still sitting there. 'Look at the time.'

He started then. 'Ah, yes, to be sure—I had forgotten.' He got up. 'Well, don't quarrel with Lisa if you make up your mind to stay there; but if you take my advice, you will leave her to herself. She will get on twice as well without you.'

The first person Isabel met when she entered her brother's house a little later was Dr Mapleston, the medical man who was attending her sister. He looked pleased to see her.

'Ah, Miss Tennent, that's right!' he exclaimed. 'I am glad you are here; I hope you are come to stay. I have just been telling Mrs Tennent she ought to have some one with her, and you are the best person.'

'Not the best,' Isabel answered, 'for I am not much of a nurse; but still if I ought to stay—if you think it necessary'——

'Necessary—of course it is. And as for nursing, anybody can do that if they only give their mind to it and obey orders. You are strong and can bear fatigue. You must take some of it off Mrs Tennent. Don't let her knock herself up. I shall look in again by-and-by.'

He ran off in a great hurry, and Isabel went up-stairs.

She found her sister very ill; and as she stood by her side, and saw her face flushed with pain and fever, and felt her hot dry hand and rapid pulse, there was a pang of self-reproach in her heart for having thought so slightly of her indisposition. For some minutes she stood watching her in silence, then she turned to Lisa.

'What does Dr Mapleston say of her? What does he think it is?' she asked in a low voice.

'I don't know; he didn't tell me'—— Lisa was beginning, when Elinor herself interposed, having caught the words.

'It is my head. This pain is dreadful, and that sea makes its worse. I wish it would stop,' she exclaimed impatiently. 'It drives me wild—it is so sad!'

Anything but sad, Isabel thought, was the rush of the little waves on the shore, and anything but sad was their sparkle as they came dancing in on the yellow sands; but Elinor listened, and then muttered again—



‘So sad! Will they never stop? What is it they say? Wrong, wrong; do you hear it, Lisa? They said it that day, and I hear them now. Listen; quite plain it is.’

Her voice sank, and she threw her head back among the pillows and moaned wearily; while Lisa, who until then had stood motionless, came forward and smoothed down the bed-clothes. Her face was very pale, but she spoke quietly.

‘I don’t think she knows what she is saying; she has been talking in that way all night. Lane says we must not listen to her; it is no use paying attention to what people say when they are ill.’

Dr Mapleston’s opinion, when he was questioned that afternoon, was not favourable. Elinor had long been in delicate health, and from the state of nervous excitement in which he had first found her, he thought there had been some strain lately upon the mind which had induced the attack of brain fever from which she was suffering. The remedies he ordered were severe; and although he did not say much, it was plain that he considered her state critical, and Isabel was startled out of her usual calm and dignified composure by this intimation of her sister’s danger. She would gladly have done what she could to make up for her first neglect, but Elinor did not care to have her with her. Her dislike to having her in her room was so apparent that Isabel found it would not do to force herself upon her, and that she should be obliged to leave to Lisa much of that attendance which under other circumstances would have fallen to her share. Still, however, she could do something; there were times when Lisa must have rest, and some one besides Lane must be there to take her place. That she must remain at the cottage, therefore, was very clear; and Percy, to whom, as soon as he returned home, she intimated her intention of so doing, assented at once without remark. She was annoyed, indeed, to see how indifferent he appeared as to whether she went or stayed, his thoughts being taken up with Lisa; and in his anxiety that she should not do too much, he seemed to forget every one else. And very absurd it was, Isabel said to herself, to be so engrossed with her. It was not necessary; and even if it had been, it was quite apparent that, however much Lisa might like such attention in general, she did not appreciate it now—that she would far rather have been left to herself. Some change had taken place in her lately, and although this alteration

was attributed by others to anxiety for her cousin, Isabel had her doubts whether other causes might not at least have some share in it; and these doubts having entered her mind, made her quick to notice things which at another time would have escaped her observation.

One evening some days later, she was sitting alone in the dusk in her sister's room. It had been a long, sad day for every one, for Elinor's fever had run very high, and during many hours she had been delirious and excited; but she was quieter just then, lying in a sort of stupor, and except her hard irregular breathing, there was not a sound to be heard in the room—scarcely in the house. Percy was away on some night duty at the barracks, Lisa had gone to her own room to rest, and for very long Isabel had sat alone and undisturbed. Wrapped in her own thoughts, she had quite forgotten how late it was getting, till the sound of a step on the gravel walk below roused her from her reverie and made her look up. She found then how dark it was, too dark for her at first to make out anything; but as she raised herself and strained her eyes to look, she saw through the dim duskiness the outline of a man's figure on the stone walk before the drawing-room window. He was stooping down, and a moment afterwards she heard the sound of something thrown against a pane of glass. There was a little silence; but presently a window was opened, and Lisa's voice met her ear.

'Is it you, Arthur?'

'Yes; can you come down to me?'

There was some reply which Isabel did not hear; it was low and hesitating.

'Never mind that,' was the answer; 'Lisa, for pity's sake, come. I must speak to you.'

The window closed again, and a moment afterwards Isabel heard her cousin's door open and the rustle of her dress as she passed down-stairs. She looked again, and saw her come out at the garden door below; she had a shawl thrown round her, and Isabel saw Arthur draw it over her head as he joined her, and then they paced the stone walk backwards and forwards for long till she was tired of looking at them.

She sat for nearly an hour longer, lost in thought, and then Lane came to tell her tea was ready, and to take her place while she was away. She went down, and in the drawing-room found Lisa seated at the tea-table. Arthur was not there, but Percy

was standing beside her, cutting the leaves of some new periodical.

‘How wet your dress is, Lisa!’ he said, as he happened to drop the paper-knife he was using, and stooped to pick it up. ‘What have you been doing?’

Lisa looked down—there was a wet border all round the bottom of her dress; and as Percy laid his hand upon it, he turned to her inquiringly.

‘You have not been out this evening, have you?’

‘A little. I suppose it got wet then; but it won’t hurt me.’

She drew it away, and turned again to the table; but he still looked at her; she was cold and pale.

‘Where did you go? On the sands?’

‘No; only in the garden. It was very pleasant there.’

‘Was it? You don’t look as if you had found it so. I am afraid you have taken cold. You seem half frozen.’

‘Do I? But I am quite warm.’

‘Warm! My dear Lisa!’ The hand which he had taken was anything but warm, but she drew it away impatiently.

‘O Percy, how you tease!’ she said, attempting a laugh. ‘Please sit down, and don’t trouble yourself about me. I am perfectly well.’

He sat down. Something in her tone, and still more in her manner, seemed to chill him, and he said no more; while his sister, who had listened in surprised displeasure to what was passing, sat silent also. Why did not Lisa mention Arthur’s name? why did she seem so preoccupied and dispirited? And with increasing suspicion Isabel sat pondering on her cousin’s strange silence.

Very little was said by any one till tea was over; and then Lisa rose, and saying something about Elinor, left the room. Percy looked after her as she went away.

‘Poor little Lisa!’ he said. ‘She is sadly out of spirits just now. I am afraid she is doing too much—making herself unhappy about Nelly.’

‘Is she?’ Isabel answered. ‘No; I don’t think so. Of course she is anxious about Nelly—every one must be; but it cannot be that only that makes her so out of spirits. She was the same before; something was wrong with her the day you came home.’

‘Something wrong!’ He looked up quickly.

'Yes; something wrong. She was not like herself then. You must have seen it, surely.'

Percy was silent: he *had* seen it, and he remembered it now. His sister saw the shade which her words brought upon his face. But he made no reply: he sat turning over the leaves of his book in silence, and she said no more; but she watched the long inquiring look which he turned upon his little wife the next time she came into the room, and she knew that the doubts then roused within him were not likely soon to slumber again.

'Lisa, dearest,' he said, when later that evening they were alone together, 'what is the matter with you? Something is making you unhappy; what is it?'

He spoke gently, as he always did to her; but perhaps he startled her, for she seemed disturbed and confused, and at first made no answer—she only fixed her eyes upon him with a bewildered look.

'What is the matter with me?' she said at last. 'I don't know what you mean; what have I done?'

'Nothing, dearest; I did not say you had done anything. I was only afraid something was vexing you. You are not like yourself, Lisa—you have not been ever since I came back. Won't you tell me what it is?'

But she was silent; there was only a movement as if she would have liked to free herself from his hold, but he had his arm round her.

'Why, Lisa,' he said, a little reproachfully, 'you don't want to get away—you are not afraid of me, surely?'

'No. But—I don't like you to be angry with me.'

'But, dearest, I am not angry. What should make you fancy so? I only wanted to know what was vexing you. I thought you would be glad to tell me—I did not know you wished to keep anything from me.'

'I don't,' she said, and there was something very sad in the tones of her voice. 'I wish—oh, I wish'——

'You wish what?' he asked tenderly. 'What is it?'

But she had drawn back again, and though her lip quivered, she said nothing. For a few moments he stood looking at her in disappointed silence, watching her varying colour and the signs of agitation in her face. But he saw she had no intention of giving him her confidence.

‘May I go?’ she said at length, in a weary tone. ‘I am very tired.’ And he roused himself then.

‘Yes, dearest. I hoped—— But never mind; if you would rather not, I won’t ask again. Good-night; and don’t stay in Nelly’s room, as you are so tired.’

He let her go, and she went away without another word. He had hoped even then that she would say something, but he was mistaken. She went away slowly, hesitatingly, but without looking back. He watched her as she crossed the room—his Lisa, his little Lisa who was so dear to him; only she seemed another then; and when the door had closed upon her, when that little white figure was really gone, he turned away with a sigh, for a shadow seemed to have fallen on the room.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

‘SEE, WHAT A READY TONGUE SUSPICION HATH.’

AFTER some days’ anxious nursing, Elinor’s illness took a turn for the better; and at the end of another week, Isabel, released from her attendance on her sister, returned to Lassell Lodge.

‘I am so glad to have you back again; it has been excessively dull without you!’ was Janet’s exclamation when, on the morning after her return, they were once more sitting together at the breakfast-table. ‘We shall have Nelly back, too, soon; and that will be pleasanter still. Poor girl, she looks dreadfully ill! The change will do her good, when she can be removed.’

‘Yes, so it will; she is not strong enough for it yet, but I daresay she will be next week. She is very low and out of spirits, and I am afraid staying there won’t help to make her anything else,’ added Isabel, thoughtfully.

‘Lisa is very kind to her,’ remarked Janet, not understanding the drift of this speech. ‘If she were her own sister she could

not do more for her. She makes a better nurse than you do, Isabel, I must say.’

‘I daresay she does. Humouring goes a great way in nursing, and that is a thing I have no patience for. I don’t think Lisa has in general; but in this case of course it is necessary.’

‘Ah, yes, poor Nelly was fractious, no doubt. When she didn’t know what she was saying or doing, she was not likely to be reasonable. It was the best way not to contradict her.’

‘I didn’t mean when she was light-headed,’ Isabel said. ‘It was only natural then; but now it is absurd. Of course, though, Lisa finds it for her interest to do so.’

A speech which her companion, comprehending as little as the former one, did not remark upon, and for some minutes there was a silence. It was broken by Janet, who looked up with a smile.

‘A penny for your thoughts, Isabel. What are you so grave about? Are you wishing yourself back at the cottage—thinking you have left Nelly too soon, or what is it?’

‘Not at all; Nelly does better without me. I am only in the way,’ she added with some bitterness. ‘They don’t want me—not even Percy. He thinks—and yet how can I help it when I see what she is?’ she paused suddenly.

‘When you see what who is?’ Janet asked. ‘What is the matter with you, Isabel? You are not like yourself. Is anything wrong?’

Isabel hesitated for a moment, but there was something unusually sympathising in her companion’s manner, and after a little silence she said, hastily—

‘I will tell you what it is, Janet,’ she said—‘what is making me so wretched. It is Percy. No, not himself,’ as her companion looked at her with surprise, ‘but thinking of him—fearing for him. For do you know what she is doing—how she is deceiving him, and that she will make his whole life miserable?’

‘Who will? Lisa! Goodness, Isabel, what do you mean? What has she done?’

Isabel was silent for a moment; and when she spoke again, the vehemence of her tones had somewhat softened, though they were still bitter.

‘Ah, you are surprised!’ she said. ‘I forgot—you don’t know everything—you don’t know all I do. But you must

have seen something—surely you must.’ She paused again, but once more urged on by sympathy and Janet’s now excited curiosity, she spoke more plainly.

She told how her suspicions that something was not right with Lisa had been first roused by what she had noticed on the night of Percy’s return from Hoole, and afterwards by what she had overheard the following day on the cottage stairs; and then proceeded to relate more fully many little things she had observed with respect to Lisa’s conduct, both as regarded Arthur and her husband. She was excited, and her story lost nothing in the telling. Janet—who, in spite of the information coming from one who was so particular in her statements, listened for some time in incredulity—opened her eyes at last in astonishment, and began by degrees to admit that things looked very strange, though she seemed shocked at the idea suggested.

‘You can’t really believe it, Isabel! It is impossible. Arthur; who would have thought it? You must be mistaken.’

‘So I thought once, but I don’t now. He never thinks of anything but amusing himself; and she—she is light, and has drawn him on; that is how it is. You know how he admires her. He has never made any secret of it.’

‘No, I know that,’ Janet said. ‘But he always talks such nonsense that I never pay attention to what he says. Who could have believed, though, Lisa would be so light! And how she used to fire up, and make a show of being virtuously indignant, if any one said anything against Percy! What hypocrisy! Well, thank Heaven, I never set up to be a pattern wife, or pretended to be better than my neighbours. Ralph and I make no fuss about caring for each other; but we get on very well together, and he has never had cause yet to think he can’t trust me; and never will have. But really—Lisa—what a thing it is! Who would have expected it from her?’

And then a discussion followed in which all Lisa’s faults and shortcomings—her defects of temper, her vanity, frivolity, and flightiness—every failing, whether real or fancied, was brought forward; and it must be confessed that, when summed up, they presented a formidable array against her. Poor Lisa was not perfect; and her cousin and Janet, indignant as they were, were not likely to make the most of the better side of her character. They did not spare her; and the conversation was only brought

to a close by Janet’s remembering that they were engaged to spend the day with some friends.

The Lawrences were a large family, and old friends of the Darrells; and there was one of them who, if Janet were to be believed, was never sorry to meet Isabel at his father’s house. He happened to be at home on this particular day, and perhaps it was this circumstance which prevented her dwelling as much as she might otherwise have done on the thoughts which had been so painfully occupying her. Between sketching, walking, and conversation, the hours slipped away; and in the midst of a cheerful family party in the evening, she forgot another home over which a gloom was fast gathering.

She rose to a remembrance of her troubles, however, on the following morning; and even had she been inclined to forget them, Janet’s first words when she met her would have recalled them to her mind. Arthur was not at breakfast, having gone to the Warren before they came down.

‘Isabel,’ she began, directly they were seated, ‘I must tell you something I heard yesterday. It is about Lisa—about that walk of hers on the sands the day Percy came home. Do you know that she was not alone then, as she let us think—that Arthur was with her? They say, too, that he was at the cottage every day while Percy was away.’ Janet lowered her voice, and looked round as she spoke, as if afraid of being overheard.

‘They say! who say? You don’t mean you told any one what we were talking of yesterday?’

‘Only mamma—oh, it’s quite safe with her!’ returned Janet, a little disconcerted as she observed the look of annoyance that showed itself in Isabel’s face. ‘She came in to call while you were all out; and we happened to say something about Lisa, so I just told her what you had noticed. She won’t repeat it, you may be quite sure.’

Isabel, however, was by no means sure of this, and her countenance betrayed the vexation she felt at Janet’s indiscretion.

‘And Mrs Lawrence was with you? Who told you that about Lisa?’ she asked after a pause.

‘Well, to say the truth,’ Janet began with some hesitation; ‘it was Cunninghame who told us.’

‘Your brother! Mr Thorpe! O Janet!’



'Nonsense, Isabel, don't be cross! I didn't know, when I was talking to mamma, that he was in the room. Really I'm very sorry; you needn't look as if you were so angry with me.'

'And he heard it all, of course?' Isabel went on, with difficulty restraining her vexation. 'What was it he said about Lisa?'

'Only that he had seen her and Arthur on the sands that day; they were walking there for ever so long; and that he had met them together, too, some other time. And he said that he and the Dicksons had seen him going into the cottage every day that fortnight Percy was out. You see he had noticed all this himself,' added Janet, more intent now upon exculpating herself than giving her news, 'so that it don't much matter his knowing a little more from us. I can't see why you care so very much about his having heard it. He is not at all likely to talk of it; no more is mamma. And Mrs Lawrence is too good-natured to say a word against any one.'

'Perhaps so; but I had much rather she hadn't the opportunity. I can't imagine, Janet, how you came to think of speaking of it. Only fancy if it should get to be the talk of the place. I don't know what Percy would do. He would never forgive us!'

She looked so uneasy, that Janet could not help feeling so too; though she did not care to show it.

'Oh, it's sure to be all right,' she said. 'I'm sorry I mentioned it to anybody, as you didn't wish it; but nobody will talk of it again. We shall see Mrs Lawrence this evening, and I'll tell her you don't wish anything said about it; and if you like, I'll go down to mamma this morning, and tell her the same. That will make it all right.'

That evening Isabel and Janet were at a large party, and the former, seated near the piano, was ostensibly listening to the singing going on there, but in reality engrossed with her own thoughts, when she heard some ladies mention Lisa's name.

'Yes, Mrs Percy Tennent; haven't you heard it? Why, everybody is full of it; I've heard it in a dozen places to-day, if I've heard it in one. And I know it must be true, for it was Mrs Jarvis who told me, and she heard it from Mrs Thorpe; so there can be no mistake about it.'

'And Major Tennent knows nothing of it?'

‘Not a word ; but then he has been from home lately. That was how it happened—young Darrell was at the house every day while he was away ; and they were going out together, and nobody knows what. They are cousins, and I am told they used to see a great deal of each other before she was married. There might have been an attachment then for anything one knows. Mr Thorpe seemed to intimate as much one day. She was a great flirt, he said ; and I can quite credit it, for she is very pretty. It is a pity her husband has not looked after her better ; and a pity too he should not know what they are doing. He must hear it soon though, one would think ; for Mrs Burns says they are talking of it at the barracks, and if it has got there, somebody is sure to be kind enough to tell him.’

‘Of course ; those kind of things always get talked about. I am very sorry for him, very sorry indeed ; but I am glad I have never called upon her. I have always been intending to do so, but we live at such a distance I find it difficult to make time ; and though Ada has teased me to go, I have been obliged to put it off. Ada raves about her—her beauty, and so on, and has been wild to see more of her. She has met her sometimes at the Deanes’, and has taken a great fancy to her ; they are nearly of an age. I am thankful, however, that the acquaintance has not gone any further. Of course I should never think of allowing my daughter to have anything to do with her.’

The last speaker was a Mrs Thetford, an acquaintance of the Darrells, and Miss Ada, the daughter in question, was sitting near.

‘Not have anything to do with whom, mamma?’ she exclaimed. ‘Not with Mrs Percy Tennent? Oh, you don’t mean it! I like her so much, she is so very pretty and so good! I like her a great deal better than anybody about here, and I don’t believe what they say against her. I’m quite sure she would not do anything wrong.’

‘My dear, you know nothing about it,’ was the answer. I am the proper person to choose your acquaintance ; and you must remember, if you please, that for the future I wish you to have nothing more to do with her.’

‘O mamma!’

‘Don’t be foolish, Ada! Do you think I wish you to make friends with anybody, whatever their character may be?’

‘But she will think it so unkind of me! And I don’t believe

a word of this; it's a mistake from beginning to end. Some horrid person who knows nothing in the world about her has said it, and now everybody thinks it's true; and I am sure it is not. It is all some dreadful slander.'

'Well, my dear, I can't help what you choose to think of it. All I know is, that I can never let you make acquaintance with anybody who is talked of as Mrs Percy Tennent is. And you may be sure that however the report has originated, there is some truth in it; there always is in such cases.'

'Poor Isabel! She had listened so far, but here she could listen no more. Had things really gone so far? Was it true that what a day or two before had been mere vague suspicion confined to herself alone, was now the talk of the place? that Lisa's name was bandied about, and become the subject of unsparing remark and censure? She was horrified when she thought of it; and most bitterly did she repent having breathed a word of her suspicions to any one. That mention of the barracks told her at once to whose agency part of the report might be traced. Mr Thorpe's acquaintance among the officers was very numerous, and she was aware that a great part of his time was spent with them. She had no doubt, therefore, that anything in circulation there, was owing to him; and her indignation against him was extreme. But she was too much vexed with herself, too well aware that the chief blame of the scandal must attach to her, to feel as angry with others as she thought at first she had a right to be. What to do now—how to avert as much as possible the consequences of her indiscretion,—was her chief thought. To speak to her brother seemed the only way. He was the proper person to act in such an affair; and he would at once put an end to Arthur's visits before things went farther, or people had time to talk any more. She resolved to see him as soon as possible, and confide to him her misgivings. And with this determination she tried to forget her uneasiness, though with but little success; and her displeasure with her cousin, whose want of prudence had been the means of placing her in such an unpleasant position, was not slight.

'For it is all your fault, Janet,' she said, later that evening when they were alone again. 'If you had not mentioned it in that foolish way, not a creature would have known it but ourselves. I must say it seems very strange you should have thought of talking of what was told you in confidence. You

might have been sure I should not wish such a thing to get talked about.’

Janet looked very angry. ‘Well, it can’t be helped now,’ she said sharply. ‘What is the use of saying so much about it? And after all, if we had not spoken, somebody else would before long. The Dicksons, you see, had noticed things already as well as you. Cunninghame said so yesterday.’

‘Mr Thorpe seems anxious to make the worst of it in every way,’ was the rejoinder, in a bitter tone. ‘It won’t be his fault if everybody in the town does not hear of it. I would rather,’ she added passionately—‘I would rather anybody in the whole world had heard it than him. I can’t bear to think of what Percy will say and do if he comes to hear that this gossip is owing to me. He will be so very angry; he will never, never forgive me.’

‘Perhaps he will never know it,’ returned Janet. ‘We may find some way of stopping it before it gets to him.’

‘Some of it must get to him,’ Isabel said decidedly. ‘I shall tell him of it, that he may put a stop to Arthur’s going there. It is the only way,’ she added, seeing Janet was about to remonstrate. ‘I have thought it over, and have made up my mind to speak to him. I shall ask him to come up here to-morrow, and then I shall be sure of seeing him alone.’

She sat down at the writing-table, and wrote off a short note, while Janet stood watching her uneasily.

‘He won’t like it,’ she remarked after a pause; ‘I am sure you have not an idea what you are doing. Much better leave things alone, and let them take their chance. What is the good of getting mixed up in such a disagreeable business?’

‘What! and let him be miserable all his life, because I shall hear a few angry words? No—I am not such a coward as that.’ She finished her note, sealed and directed it. ‘Will you let it be sent to the cottage the first thing in the morning?’

‘Yes, certainly, if you really wish it;’ and then looking at her watch, Janet yawned, and said, that as it was long past twelve, she thought the best thing they could do would be to go to bed.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE MEETING IN THE SHRUBBERY.

JANET had truly said that Isabel did not know what she was doing, when she took upon herself to awaken in Percy's mind the distrust which filled her own. Much as she dreaded the interview for which she had prepared herself, she had by no means realised what it was to cost both herself and him. It was not until on the following day she actually met her brother, that the difficulty of what she was about to do presented itself to her. They strolled for some time in the shrubbery where they met, talking of Elinor and other things, without her saying a word of what she had summoned him to hear. On reaching a gate, however, which led out of the grounds, he made a pause.

'I can't go back,' he said, 'I have no time; Lisa will be waiting for me. You wished to see me about something; what was it?'

Isabel was silent for a moment; the colour rushed to her face, and her heart began to beat nervously.

'It was about Lisa,' she said, with some hesitation. 'Did you ever say anything to her about having been out alone that day you came back from Hoole?' she said at length, thinking this a good commencement.

Percy looked surprised. 'Yes, oh yes, we made it all right,' was his hasty answer.

'Oh!' Isabel was silent for a moment; 'she told you how it was then?'

'How it was! No, it was a fancy of hers, I suppose. She was very sorry; I could not be angry with her, poor child.'

Isabel's look was one of pitying astonishment. 'You really passed it over without explanation?'

He appeared annoyed. 'Nonsense, Isabel! What should I want explanations for? Do you think I can't trust Lisa?'

'I think you trust her so fully, Percy, that it is a great pity she is not more open with you,' was the very grave answer. 'I

think she might have told you that she was not alone then, as you thought—that Arthur was with her. Mr Thorpe met them together.’

‘Thorpe! Arthur with her! But why on earth didn’t she say so then?’

‘I don’t know—you must ask her that. You had better ask her, too, why Arthur was at the cottage every day while you were away. Perhaps she can give some good reason for it; but at present it certainly seems strange.’

She spoke quietly, but her tone was not to be mistaken, and her brother’s dark cheek flushed.

‘Isabel, what do you mean to insinuate?’ he exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion; and he turned and confronted her with a look that would have made most people quail. But she stood her ground.

‘I knew you would be angry with me,’ she said sadly. ‘But I could not bear you to be deceived.’

‘Deceived! Who told you I was deceived? Take care what you are saying—you may go too far,’ he exclaimed, walking up and down in front of her, his face growing darker still, and the veins in his forehead swelling almost to bursting, in the storm of anger which he kept only half controlled. And she stood leaning against the shrubbery gate, her arms folded, looking at him not in fear, but with eyes of pity.

‘What can have put such thoughts into your head?’ he said at last, pausing in his walk, and speaking with forced calmness; ‘you must know there is no truth in them. Lisa is good and pure—pure as an angel. Why should I not trust her? Why should you try to make me doubt her? It is cruel—cruel both to her and to me. Isabel, I never thought you would have pleasure in making me wretched.’

Isabel’s lip quivered, but it was only for a moment.

‘Nor can you think it now, Percy; you know it is not so; that it is in the hope of saving you from wretchedness that I am speaking at all. And as for the thoughts of which you accuse me, they must be your own; for I have said nothing of mine.’

‘You always thought hardly of her,’ he interrupted in great bitterness. ‘You were always hard upon my little Lisa; she was never good enough for you, and now you are trying to set me against her; but you can’t do it. I’ll trust her through anything—through anything and everything.’

'You mistake me altogether,' Isabel said, endeavouring to speak calmly; 'don't let us begin old discussions again, and rake up old grievances. I have no wish to go back to the past, nor is it of much consequence whether what I thought of Lisa were right or wrong. All I want is to prevent your being any longer—I mean'—— she hesitated——'however much you may trust her, you needn't allow Arthur's folly and thoughtlessness to'——

Percy set his teeth together, and it was the look on his face at this fresh mention of his cousin's name that made Isabel pause so suddenly. For the first time she felt something like fear.

'Where is he?' he asked in a stifled voice; 'is he come in yet?'

'No,' and she was quite relieved to be able to say so. 'He will not be at home at all to-day—not for several days, I think. His friend Harry Conyers has had an accident, and telegraphed for him to go to him; he went off all in a hurry.'

Percy took another turn, the hard look upon his face growing still harder.

'Where is Conyers now?' he asked at length, stopping again in front of her.

'I don't know—he is in town somewhere—in lodgings, isn't he? Arthur gave no address; it would not have been like him if he had.'

She did not say so, but the feeling uppermost in her mind was one of intense thankfulness for this oversight of her cousin's. The dread lest he and her brother should meet before the anger of the one had had time to cool, would otherwise have been overpowering. Percy's next words, however, were not very reassuring.

'It's not of much consequence,' he muttered between his teeth. 'I can wait. And yet, Lisa! No, I can't, I won't believe it! It is vile scandal, all of it. Who has dared to talk of her in that way? Some of your friends, I suppose,' with a fierce angry glance at her, 'the Thorpes of course. Thorpe met them together, you say—not much harm in that either,' ironically, 'but it makes a good story, and *you* can believe it,' with increasing sarcasm. 'He had better take care, though, what he says of her—of my wife,' he added fiercely.

Isabel looked rather pale. She could not tell him Lisa was the talk of the place, and that it was thanks to her, his sister,

that she was so. For a moment she was silent, trying to calm herself, and then she said—

‘You don’t think I should listen to any stories Mr Thorpe liked to tell, if there were nothing else to confirm them ; nor do I mean to say there is any real harm in anything Lisa has done. But she is young and thoughtless, and’——

‘And light and frivolous,’ put in Percy in the same tone of irony. ‘Yes, I remember—I know all you mean to say.’

‘I think,’ Isabel went on, still making an effort to preserve her self-control—‘I think you ought to put a stop to Arthur’s going so much to your house. She is not open with you, Percy ; say what you will about being able to trust her, there are things she keeps from you. Why should she have made any secret of Arthur’s having been with her that day ? why should she—— Ah, yes, you are angry with me,’ seeing the dark look he flashed upon her ; ‘I knew you would be—but I made up my mind to bear it. For it is only because I am speaking the truth that you care so much about it. Surely, though, it is better to put you on your guard now before it is too late. And that you may know I don’t go only by what others say, I can tell you what I know myself.’

And in a few hasty words, often interrupted by her brother’s impatient exclamations, she told many things she had seen and heard which she believed justified the idea she had formed of Lisa’s duplicity. She made no comment—she only stated bare facts ; but these were enough for her purpose : it needed no remarks of hers, in his present state of mind, to make him believe her suspicions were correct ; and the fierce, indignant impatience with which at first he listened to her, changed by degrees into the silence of despairing conviction. Alarmed at his look of utter overpowering misery, she stopped short suddenly.

‘O Lisa !’ was his exclamation, wrung from him in bitterness. Her silence, her embarrassment—he understood all now ; and not only that, but he had a solution of all that had lately seemed strange to him in her conduct. The change in her which he had remarked, her confusion on the day of his return when he had found Arthur with her in the cottage garden, and many other things remembered only too well, were explained, and seemed to prove beyond a doubt the truth of Isabel’s assertion.

Anger until now, and the disbelief which he had tried to cherish, had kept him up ; but when disbelief was gone, anger



too went—it was swallowed up in other and more bitter feelings ; and as he stood there, almost riveted, as it seemed, to the spot, his sister was startled by the expression of his face and the anguish written in it. She moved forward a few steps and laid her hand upon his arm.

‘Don’t look like that, Percy,’ she said beseechingly. ‘Lisa has been thought less but that is all—she meant no harm probably—no more did Arthur. They have only been foolish,’ she added, repeating Janet’s arguments in the hope of giving comfort ; ‘but it is at an end now, and you will see nothing of the sort happens again. You must not make yourself miserable ; there is no real harm done, you know.’

No harm done ! Not when his trust was gone—not when the love of which he had been so proud was no longer his—when he had only a divided heart, and his wife had thoughts and secrets in which he might have no share. And she had been his idol ; his first thought each morning, his last at night, had been for her—the labour of his life, ever since he had called her his, had been to make her happy. And he had believed she was so ; but now—— ! No harm done ! Ah, Isabel little knew what she was saying when she gave such comfort as that ! But the words roused him. He would not be pitied, no one should guess anything of the intense bitterness of his feelings. Shaking off her hand, he walked away, turning back, however, before he had gone many steps, to say in a constrained husky voice—

‘I shall see Arthur when he comes home. I shall not allow my wife to be talked about through his folly, and so you may tell him. He shall answer to me for it.’

And without waiting for a reply, he strode away once more, and was out of sight before she knew he was going. And then her self-control seemed to desert her, and for many minutes she remained leaning against the wicket-gate with her face hidden, striving to get the better of the many painful feelings that oppressed her. What the struggle was, however, that was passing in her mind—whether she regretted the step she had taken, and would, had it been possible, have recalled it, none could tell. She raised her head at last, slowly and almost timidly, as if she half expected to see some one she dreaded to meet, lingering near. But she was alone ; there was no one there. Only some bird with its bright eye looked out upon her from a neigh-

bouring shrub, and there was a gentle rustling in the trees around, but all besides was silence and solitude. And without turning again, with a downcast eye and a faltering step, she left the place where she had seen the wreck of her brother's happiness, and went slowly and thoughtfully back to the house.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE SHADOWS DEEPEN.

WHERE Percy went that afternoon no one ever knew ; he did not even know himself. The long waning hours of that summer's day passed unheeded by him ; and where he wandered, or what he did, he never afterwards remembered. He only knew he was alone—alone with that stunning grief that had come upon him. His sister was not there to watch him with those pitying eyes. There was nothing to disturb the memory of all his idol had been to him. He could think of her undisturbed ; of his beautiful, his loved ; so prized and so cherished, but so changed now. He walked in the presence of summer that day, the green woods of summer waved above him, summer birds sang in the trees, and summer sunlight sparkled on the distant waters ; but for anything he knew it might have been the dreariest, blackest night of winter. The brightness was gone from everything, as it was gone from his own life.

But wretched as he was, the first overwhelming tumult of his feelings passed away by degrees. Those hours of loneliness calmed him down, and gave him leisure for thought. Though his trust in Lisa was gone, his love for her was not—love deep, tender, and enduring as ever ; and with that love remained his care and thought for her. She was in no situation to bear reproaches, nor should she hear them ; no word from him should

tell her of the pain she had caused him, nor should anything he could do be wanting for her happiness and comfort. No harm should come to her through him; she should still be watched over and guarded as the greatest treasure of his life; only—but he put away that thought as far too bitter to dwell on; and if when, after long wanderings, he returned to his home that evening, there were signs of the storm he had gone through in his compressed lip and hard stern face, his coldness was that of manner only; and in his heart there was nothing but the warmest, most passionate love for the little wife whose heedless trifling was the cause of his misery.

She met him as he came into the room where she was dressing for dinner with a smile, which had, however, something anxious in it.

‘How late you are to-day, Percy! I have been expecting you since two o’clock. You told me you would be at home then.’

‘Did I?’ He looked at his watch; it was past seven.

‘Yes; had you forgotten? What has kept you so long?’

He said something, but it was not intelligible; and he was turning away when a sudden thought struck him. He came back to the table at which she was standing, watching him in some uneasiness.

‘I was at Lassell Lodge this afternoon, Lisa. Isabel tells me Arthur is gone to town.’

He tried to speak naturally, but his tone was constrained, and whether she noticed it or not, her countenance changed visibly and her colour deepened; but although she must have been surprised at his intelligence, for he noticed that she slightly started, she made no remark. She seemed occupied with a bracelet she was endeavouring to clasp, but which in her nervousness slipped from her hand and fell upon the floor. He picked it up and fastened it on for her, and then said in a voice which agitation made even colder than before—

‘You saw a good deal of him, I suppose, while I was away?’

It was a question which she had not expected, and she started again, and looked up at him for a moment; but her eye fell beneath his.

‘I don’t know; no, not much. He was here two or three times, I think.’

It was enough. Until then he had had some lingering hope

that there might be some mistake ; that, if she liked, she might have given some explanation to satisfy him : he had even put the question in the trust that by meeting her half way he might lead her to be open ; but that hope was gone now. Not only was she meeting him with reserve, but with positive untruth ; and if she could condescend to that, where indeed was his trust to be ? He let her hand fall, and walking away to his dressing-room, closed the door without another word.

He came down to dinner silent and grave ; and Lisa, too, was silent. She made an effort later to recover herself ; and when she returned from a visit to Elinor's room, and found him sitting at the open window in the twilight, she opened the piano and proposed some music.

'Nelly is so much better to-night,' she said, 'that we needn't be afraid of disturbing her. I can sing as long as you like.'

There was no answer from him ; but she sat down, and running her fingers over the keys, began one of his favourite songs. He had always before come to stand over her while she was singing, but now he did not move. She listened in vain for his step, and when she had finished she looked round. He was still sitting in the same attitude, and with the same look upon his face ; while his eye watched absently the waving of the acacia-trees on the little garden lawn. She turned back and began another—some verses from an old song which Isabel had once set to music, and which he had often heard Mary and herself sing together at home.

'Ah me ! art thou unknowing  
Of the happy days that were ?  
The glade was then all-glowing,  
And life was then all-fair.

Then thou didst walk with me, love,  
With me thy thoughts didst share,  
Ne'er thought I these would be, love,  
The happy days that were.

For now we walk apart, love,  
Mistrust is all we share ;  
And locked is either's heart, love,  
Oh, happy days that were !'

But even that did not bring him to her side, and her voice

sounded a little husky at last. She did not attempt a third, but played two or three light airs; and then getting up, closed the piano, and presently stole up to the window where he sat. His face looked stern and dark in the fading light, and if she could have guessed anything of the wild maddening thoughts that were filling his heart at that moment, she would have shrunk from him in dismay and dread; for all the deep ungoverned feelings of his passionate nature had been stirred within him while she sang. The sound of her voice in that old well-remembered song had awakened the memories of those bygone times, of those 'happy days that were,' and he felt goaded to desperation by the recollection of them; for she was not the same she had been, she was no longer his Lisa, to whom he had once been all in all. Rather, far rather, he said to himself, would he have laid her in her grave than have known her so changed; and almost the wish that she were there, that he had looked his last at her, and buried away out of sight the being he loved only too well, was in his heart.

Poor Lisa! She guessed nothing of that mad wild wish. She knew nothing of those dark thoughts within him; and delicate fragile child as she was, whom a touch it seemed might have crushed, she did not shrink from him. She stood for a few minutes beside him, and then when she found he still took no notice of her, she sat down on the arm of his chair, and by-and-by laid her head upon his shoulder. At any other time he would have responded by drawing her closer to him; but now he did not move.

'Percy,' she began at last in her loving tones, 'you are tired, are you not?'

'No; not particularly.' He spoke with an effort.

'Where have you been all day?' she asked again. 'It was so dull without you. I was wondering all the afternoon where you were, and wanting you back.'

Wanting him! No; a few hours ago he might have believed that, but not now. He sat up suddenly, and the movement made her raise herself also. She looked at him in surprise.

'What are you going to do? Where are you going?' she said, as he rose from his chair.

'I don't know—out, I believe. Anywhere away from here,' he muttered.

‘Out! and you have been in such a little time! Oh, but,’ she added, brightening again, ‘may I come with you?’

‘*You!*’ It was from her he was longing to get away. ‘No; of course not. It is far too late for you to be out.’

‘Is it?’ It’s not dark yet. I haven’t been out at all to-day, Percy. I was with Nelly this morning, and all the afternoon I was waiting for you.’

‘Indeed! But there was no need to have done that; there was Lane to go with you if you wished—if indeed’ (oh, what evil demon within him prompted the speech!)—‘if indeed you thought it necessary to consult my wishes in such a trifle; if not, a walk alone would have answered the purpose equally well.’

Lisa’s face crimsoned: even in the dusky twilight he could see the change in her countenance.

‘I thought—I hoped—O Percy, won’t you forgive me? I thought you had.’ She burst into tears.

‘What, for that walk *alone*? Of course I have, there was nothing in it. Nothing certainly to cause any tears,’ he added impatiently, irritated at the sight of her distress. ‘Pray don’t let us have a scene, Lisa; there is nothing I dislike so much.’

Lisa dried her eyes quickly, and made an attempt to check her almost hysterical sobbing.

‘I am very sorry. I didn’t mean to be foolish and vex you, only I am so—so’—— She was obliged to stop once more, or she would have broken down again. It was so long since she had heard angry words of any kind, that she did not know what to make of them now; and coming as they did from him, they seemed more than she could bear. She stood, keeping back her tears, but looking the picture of misery. And he had no sooner uttered those hasty words than he bitterly repented them. Where were his resolutions of that afternoon? his resolutions that she should hear no reproaches from him, and that, wretched as he himself might be, it should never be his fault if she were not happy? He had forgotten them all, broken them before a few hours were over, and yet all the time he loved her more than he had ever done. But that was the very reason; it was the thought that he was so little to her, while she was all the world to him, which was making him so ungenerously harsh with her. He turned to her now with a heavy sigh.

‘Lisa, I was wrong. I had no right to be angry with you; and I should not have been, but’——he hesitated. She looked so beautiful as his words brought the sudden light back to her face, and as she raised her eyes full of glad surprise to his face, that he could not meet her gaze. ‘The truth is, I have heard something to-day which has—— well, never mind. No need I should have been unjust to you on that account. You must forget what I said, Lisa. I did not mean it.’

‘You didn’t mean it! O Percy, thank you! And if you only would really forgive me, you don’t know how happy it would make me. I couldn’t help being sorry just now, because’——her voice faltered. ‘Did you say something had vexed you to-day? What is it? You will tell me, won’t you?’ She looked at him beseechingly. Ah, who would have dreamed she could act a part so well? Lisa, who once had been so true, so frank and guileless? That was the thought that crossed his mind, when for one moment, softened and disarmed, he had been about to yield to the influence of her beauty and loving ways.

‘I can tell you nothing; let me go,’ he exclaimed hastily, as she was trying to detain him; and then checking himself once more, he said in a tone half of irony, half of sadness, ‘Leave me to myself, Lisa; it is nothing that will trouble you. Better you should ask no questions.’

He disengaged himself from her detaining hand, and left the room. She heard him cross the hall and the house door close after him, and the heavy sound seemed to send a shiver through her. When its last echo died away, she sat down where she had been standing, and covered her face with her hands. She did not cry now; he had said he did not like tears, so at any cost they must be kept back; but she sat in the gathering darkness, and felt so wretched and lonely that it would have been well for her if she could have given way to the grief she was trying to restrain.

The shadows had indeed fallen on a home that had once been one of the happiest in the land.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## UP AMONG THE HILLS AGAIN.

‘AND you promise me, then? O Arthur, do tell me you will.’

‘Upon my honour I will. What makes you look at me in that way, Lisa?’

‘I don’t know’——her voice faltered a little. ‘I have been so unhappy lately; and—I am half afraid. But you really will now?’

‘Haven’t I given you my word? Don’t be such an unbeliever. And now I must be off, so good-bye till to-morrow.’

Lisa smiled, but it was a little uneasily. ‘Are you going home now?’ she asked, as he held out his hand.

‘No, indeed; I wish I were. I had a note from the Warren this morning, and must go over there first. Good-bye.’ And away he went. She heard the sound of his horse’s hoofs in the road for a few moments, and then silence followed; while in the house itself there was a long unbroken stillness, for Percy was away, having gone out only a few minutes before Arthur had made his appearance, and there were no signs at present of his return.

It was a quiet summer’s evening, the only sounds around being the ripple of the waves upon the beach, and the distant voices of children at their play. What were Lisa’s thoughts as, long after Arthur had left her, she sat at the open window with her head resting on her hand, and her eyes fixed dreamily on the far-off horizon? Her face in the evening sunlight looked sad and pale; and Prince, who was crouching in the folds of her dress, and kept thrusting his nose between her fingers for the caresses he was accustomed to receive, whined pitifully once or twice when he found they did not come.

The sun went down behind the hills on the other side of the bay, the golden glow that he had left upon the waters faded away, and the shadows of night stole over the grey sea and the darkening sky, but she never moved. It was not until Lane came in with the lamp that she appeared to remember how late it was, and that she was still alone. She started then.



'But I was only resting,' she said in answer to her nurse's inquiries. 'I don't want anything. And you may leave that window open, Lane, at present, please. It's very hot to-night, and Major Tennent comes in that way sometimes.'

Lane gave a grunt expressive of some little dissatisfaction as she closed the shutters of the other window. 'Is he going to be out long, Miss Lisa?' She had never yet arrived at calling her young mistress by any other name than the old familiar one by which she had always known her. 'You must find it very dull, dear, all alone by yourself. It's a good bit more than two hours since he went, isn't it?'

Lisa stopped a sigh that was coming. 'I don't know. He will be back soon, I daresay; I'm not dull,' she said, trying to speak naturally. But Lane was not so easily deceived, she had caught a glimpse of the sad face as she was crossing the room, and drew her own conclusions from it. She said no more, however, and after lingering two or three minutes longer, arranging chairs and books, disappeared, saying something as she went about coming back soon if Major Tennent did not return.

She had been gone some time, and Lisa was really beginning to feel lonely, and to wonder what could be the cause of her husband's long delay, when she heard the garden gate open, and steps upon the gravel walk leading up from the beach. She rose quickly then, and going to the table, took up some work that was lying there. Her head was bent over it, and her fingers were very busy, when Percy entered through the open window; but, though she did not raise her eyes, and appeared intent on what she was doing, she did not make much progress with it. It was a baby's frock, and there were not many stitches required to finish it; ten minutes' work would have completed all there was to do, but her hand was unsteady, and perhaps there was something in Percy's quick impatient step up and down the room which discomposed her. He had not said a word when he came in, and it was as well for her she did not look up; that heavy ominous-sounding tread indeed warned her that something was wrong, and kept her eyes down. The silence between them was becoming oppressive, and how long it might have continued would be hard to say, had he not in his walk across the room come upon something lying on the floor and stooped to pick it up. It was a man's glove, and thinking it was his own, he was about to fling it on a table near, when a

thought struck him, and he turned to the light with it. The sudden cessation in his walk, and his pause so near her, made Lisa look up, but she shrank away as she caught sight of his face. For some minutes he looked at the glove without speaking; then he held it out to her.

'Whose is that, Lisa?' he said in a strange stern tone that made her tremble from head to foot; and which seemed, too, to take from her all power of speech, for though her lips moved, no sound came from them.

'He is come home then, is he?' he went on in the same low and terribly unnatural voice. 'And he has been here? What did he come for?'

She looked at him with frightened eyes and quivering lip; but still no answer came.

'Do you hear me, Lisa?' he exclaimed passionately, and forgetting all prudence in the excitement of the moment. He was wound up to such a pitch, indeed, that he scarcely knew what he was doing; and the signs of agitation in her, which would have softened him at any other time, now served only to exasperate him.

'Do you hear me?' he repeated hoarsely. 'He has been here, has he not?'

She gasped for breath. 'Arthur, do you mean?' she said faintly. 'Yes. But he is gone now—to the Warren. He came just after you went out,' she added.

Percy's brow was dark as a thundercloud. 'He did? And you can stand there and tell me so! Lisa, do you know what you are doing?' And he seized her arm and grasped it so roughly that she uttered a cry of pain. 'What did he come for? Will you answer me that?'

But Lisa's head was drooping, for she was sick and giddy with the pain of that iron grasp, and she made no reply.

'Ah, it's enough,' he said, in bitter scorn. 'I see how it is; and better certainly you should be silent than try to deceive me with excuses that can have no truth in them. And now, Lisa, listen to me. Never again do you see him—never again does he come to this house. Yes, you may look, but you cannot pretend to misunderstand. If he ever crosses this threshold, or tries to meet you, he will rue it most dearly. You have said your last words to him; and once for all, I forbid you to see or speak to him again. Do you hear?'

'Yes, I hear you.' Her face was very pale and her lips white. 'O Percy, don't hurt me!' she exclaimed, bursting into tears. 'Don't hurt me; don't be angry with me. I have done nothing wrong—indeed—indeed I haven't.'

'You have done nothing wrong!' he repeated with great bitterness. 'Ah, well, as far as deeds are concerned, I believe you, Lisa—if you call it "nothing wrong" to stop short of them, I believe you. But do you call it no wrong to have trifled with me, to have deceived me as you have done? Is it no wrong to have forgotten your promises, and been false to me in your heart—to me who loved as I believe no other man ever loved before—who had no thought but for you, no wish but to make you happy. For I worshipped you, Lisa! I thought you good and true; and you could deceive me! Ah, you may well hide your face! I wish I had never seen it—never seen the beauty of which I have been so proud. And yet I love you still. Yes, that is my misery—that, when your love for me is gone, I should still love you as well as in the days, the happiest days of all my life, when I fancied you had no thought for any but me! Ah, well, that dream is over now, and would it had never come! Would I had never known you, Lisa! I should be happier now; happier than I shall ever be again!'

He flung her from him, and with a look of agony written on every feature, rushed from the room. He heard a cry, a low wailing cry of misery as he went, but it did not stop him; and although it was still ringing in his ears, as in his blind fury he dashed down the road leading away from his home, it had no power to turn him. To get away from her, to meet him who was the cause of his wretchedness, was his one thought; and bent on this, he hurried on, maddened and desperate. Down the quiet shady lane he went, where she had often walked with him, and out on the moonlit road where the hedges grew low, and the clumps of trees were few and far between—where the wind from the ocean blew fresh and cool, and the murmur of the waves upon the rocky shore fell soothingly on the ear. But not on his; its music had no power to still the wild tumult of his spirit. He hurried on, and did not know when its last sounds had died away, and he was alone with the silence of the night. The hills which rose above him to the right looked wild and solitary in the moonlight, and among them lay the road to the Warren. And Arthur was there; she had said so. The

thought was enough, and he turned that way with long strides, that soon took him up those steep hillsides, and into the lonely road he sought. Very lonely it was—very desolate; and not a living creature crossed his path as he wandered on; more slowly now, for what need for haste when he and his cousin must surely meet at last. And then—but what was to come then, he did not ask himself. Only the stern and deep-set lines upon his face, and his fiercely-clenched hand, told of the feelings that possessed him.

And so he wandered on until he came at last to those same woods where, not many weeks before, he and Lisa had come together. There was a change there since that time; for the trees, which then had just been bursting into leaf, were now full with all their summer foliage; the pink flush of the elm had turned to green, and the maple and the beech stood out thickly dark against the evening sky; but the place itself was the same. There were the high banks where she had found her wild-flowers, and there, as he came to a turning in the road, was the broad sheet of water beside which they had sat on that May afternoon. It lay as it had lain then, without a ripple on its surface; only there was no sparkling sunlight on it now. The trees that flung the long shadows of their boughs across its waters looked like the guardian genii of the place, and all around it darkness and silence brooded—silence so still and deep that it seemed as if some mystery enshrouded it. The voice of the night wind in the far-off woods did not reach the spot, and the stars, which looked down with their grave and solemn eyes from their watches on high, could not pierce the shades that hung over it, or light up its dreamy depths. Very quiet and lonely it was; and pausing beside the stone where Lisa had once found a seat, he stood with his eyes fixed on the dark water before him, lost in most bitter thoughts. For as he stood there with folded arms in the gloom and shadow, in fancy that sunny day came back once more, and Lisa was with him there. Again he saw the waving of the green boughs above her head, and the light that danced among the early leaves; he saw it playing round her—on her hair of brown and gold, and on her upturned face; and again he met the gaze of her shy dark eyes, and listened to the sweet girlish tones of her voice, and the low music of her laugh. But then the vision was

gone again; and he started to find himself alone, at night, by that lonely pool among the woods and hills, and to remember what had brought him there—to remember, too, that the voice to which in fancy he had been listening was a thing now of other days, that its tones could never sound again to him as they had sounded then, that the face on which he had looked with such pride was altered; its brightness dimmed, its beauty all gone for him. Instead of that vision of sunny loveliness which his fancy had conjured up, he saw her as she was in reality, as he had left her not long before—a pale, frightened, and shrinking thing. Ah, how unlike his little Lisa, the pride once of his life, the flower of his home!

How long he stood there he did not know. But there was a sound at last which roused him, and as he raised his head to listen he became aware of a change around him. The moon was still shining at intervals, but it was from between dark masses of clouds which were fast gathering in the sky; and there was no stillness now among the trees and on the hillsides; the low, far-off murmur of the evening wind had changed to another and a drearier tone, and a whistling and a wailing was in the woods. There were signs of a coming storm; but though he noted these, it was not to think of them. He had no thought then for anything but that other sound which his ear had caught, and which he heard still, above the rush and the moaning in the tree-tops—that sound of horse's hoofs on the distant road. With a strange fixed look upon his face, he stood watching for the first glimpse of the rider with an impatience that was almost beyond control.

He came at last; the dark forms of man and horse were discernible among the trees, and some seconds afterwards they emerged on the more open road that bordered the pool. And there they paused; and in the bright light of the moon which shone out from behind a cloud, the rider stooped down to examine something that was amiss with his horse. He raised his head after a moment's inspection, and then the light fell full on his face, and Percy saw he was not mistaken. It was Arthur who was before him.

And then came a rush of thoughts from which in calmer moments he would have shrunk in horror. There was the cousin who had wronged him—the cousin whom he had always looked upon as a brother, who had been free to come and

go as he liked in his house, who had always found a welcome there. There he sat with a smile upon his handsome face, and burning feelings of hatred were in Percy's heart as he looked at him, while wild thoughts of revenge crossed his mind. That lonely road—that deep pool—what tales would they ever tell of dark deeds done there? He pressed his hands upon his burning brow, as if to shut out that deadly thought; but once again it came. Once more he looked at his unconscious cousin, and then at those dark silent waters at his feet. No voice from their depths would ever tell of the grave that had been found there—the green boughs that waved above them, the winds that moaned and whistled round would not betray the secret; the very sky was veiled in clouds, and the stars that had watched him with their thousand eyes were hidden from his sight. He and his cousin were alone; revenge was in his power. It was a moment of madness; and not darker and more stormy was the sky above him than was the rush of wild, uncontrolled thoughts prompting him to that deed of terrible vengeance. With one hurried glance round, he half started from the shade in which he had been standing and made a step forward. Oh, surely at that moment it must have been his good angel who in the rush of the wild wind passed by him and stayed his uplifted hand with a whisper of words well-nigh forgotten—of words learnt long years ago as a little child at his mother's knee—the words of the Christian's daily prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'! Into what temptation was he not then entering? to what thoughts of deadly evil had he not given way, and where were they not leading him? He, Percy Tennent, a murderer! Had it come to that? That he, who, even in the din and excitement of battle, had stayed to save the life of one who had cruelly wronged him, should now raise his hand in cold blood against another, who had been as a brother to him! Should he add the misery of crime to all his present wretchedness, and go through life haunted by a recollection of that night, and a fell deed of vengeance done then? Would that vengeance, too, undo the past, or bring him back the happiness he had lost? Would it bring him back Lisa's smiles, Lisa's love? Would it make his home again what it had been? or would it not rather darken it with an ever-deepening shadow?

He paused. 'Lead *me* not into temptation' was perhaps his prayer, for his hand fell; and in that moment of hesitation,

Arthur, unconscious of the danger in which he had stood, passed on, and Percy was once more left alone with the silence and solitude of the night.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### DISCLOSURES.

THERE was a dance that evening at Lassell Lodge, where a gay party was assembled. The rooms were sparkling with lights, and bright with flowers and ladies' dresses, and strains of music rang out and filled the air with their enlivening sounds. On every side smiling faces and joyous looks spoke of the pleasure which all had come to seek, and which, with one exception, all seemed to have found. That exception was Elinor Tennent. She had returned to her cousin's, but was very far from having recovered her strength since her illness; and as she sat at one of the bay-windows, which had been set wide open to admit as much air as possible, she looked very pale and listless. Janet, who was crossing the room, stopped for a moment beside her.

'Tired out, Nelly? What are you doing here alone? I thought I saw Cunninghame with you just now?'

'Yes, he has gone to get me an ice. How hot it is to-night!'

'Very. I think we shall have a storm. But you need not look so frightened. It has not begun yet. If it comes, too, we shall not hear it through the music.' She laughed as Elinor glanced nervously at the dark sky.

'I wonder where Arthur is!' she added after a pause, perhaps with the charitable intention of diverting her companion's thoughts. 'He can't be coming this evening. And I quite expected him. I thought he wouldn't have missed a dance for a good deal.'

‘Yes, but the last train does not come in till nearly twelve; he has hardly had time to get here yet. I daresay we shall see him in a few minutes.’

‘Perhaps so. Ah, there is Mrs Lawrence! I must go and speak to her.’ And Janet moved away again.

She had not been gone two minutes, and Elinor was still absorbed in watching a black mass of threatening-looking clouds which had caught her attention at the first mention of a storm, when the opening of a door beside her made her look round. It was not the regular entrance, and she wondered who could be making their way in that direction. Her astonishment was still greater when, upon moving her chair a little to give free ingress to the new-comer, she discovered it was her own brother.

‘Why, Percy, what brings you here?’ she exclaimed in surprise; but as he turned at the sound of her voice, she was startled at the expression of his face. ‘Is anything the matter?’ she asked in alarm.

‘Where is Janet?’ he said, without noticing the question. ‘Is she here?’

She looked round the room. ‘She was with me just now. But—Percy, what is the matter? How strange you look!’

‘Never mind how I look,’ was the peremptory answer. ‘Find Janet for me, and tell her I want her at once.’ And without giving her time for another question, he turned away and closed the door.

Alarmed by his manner, Elinor went in search of her cousin, whom she discovered in the music-room with Mrs Lawrence.

‘Percy here! Why didn’t he come in?’ Janet said, when she heard his message. ‘What is the matter, Nelly? Is anything wrong?’

‘I don’t know,’ Elinor said. ‘Go directly, Janet, won’t you? He’s waiting for you.’

There was no need to hasten her cousin’s movements, for Janet was gone before she had done speaking, and Elinor, left behind, tried to give her attention to Mrs Lawrence, and answer her questions; but her nervousness increased every moment, and when after a time they were joined by some one else, she seized the opportunity of making her escape. Going into the entrance-hall, she found great confusion there; servants were running about in all directions, and through a half-open door she heard Janet’s voice raised to an excited key. What had happened? Some-



thing, she was sure—something dreadful, as the recollection of her brother's face came back to her mind; and with a shudder she was about to turn away, when some new thought struck her and she went on. Before she reached the opposite door she was stopped by one of the servants.

‘I think, miss, you had better not go in there,’ he began; ‘Mr Arthur has——’

At that moment, however, the door was suddenly opened wider by Isabel, who was coming out, and a sight met Elinor's eyes which her worst fears had not conjured up.

On a sofa lay Arthur; his face deadly pale, his fair hair wet and dabbled with blood, and his left arm hanging helplessly by his side. He looked as if life were gone; and she believed it was. But in her blanched and terror-stricken countenance there were other feelings depicted besides those of natural dread at what she saw. There was sudden anguish written there, and overpowering grief; and her sister, who had been passing her in haste, stopped short, alarmed at her look. At first she stood motionless, almost as if paralysed, her eyes fixed on the unconscious form before her; but the power of thought and action came back, and then, with a shriek that rang through the house, she rushed into the midst of the startled group who had gathered round the sofa.

‘Arthur, Arthur, O Arthur!’ she exclaimed wildly. ‘Oh, who has done this? Who has taken him from me? Yes, from me—for he was mine. Oh, what am I saying? I didn't mean to tell. Don't be angry with me, Arthur; I didn't know what I said. Ah, he can't hear me, he is dead!’ And in an agony of grief she flung herself on her knees beside him, and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

To describe the consternation, the bewilderment, which her unexpected appearance and wild incoherent words caused among the bystanders would be impossible. For some moments they looked at each other in blank dismay, and Elinor's sobs were the only sounds that broke the silence of the room. But Percy, whose face, hard and stern before, had grown still sterner at her words, spoke at last.

‘Take her away,’ he said to Janet; ‘she does not know what she is saying. And keep those people out, they must not come here.’ For the dancers, alarmed at that appalling shriek, were making their way into the hall, dismay in every face. Their

voices recalled Elinor to herself, and there was no need then of entreaties from Janet that she would not stay. Frightened and ashamed of what she had done, she rose hastily, and as others about her made way for the surgeon, who appeared at that moment, she escaped in the general confusion. Taking refuge in an empty room, she crouched down in an armchair, and covering her face with her hands, gave full vent to her misery.

The confused sound of voices in the adjoining room died away by degrees, and one after another she heard the carriages come up to the door and then drive off, until every one had left, and total silence reigned in the house. In it, but not out of it; for the storm which Janet had predicted came on, and a heavy fall of rain and the loud crashing of thunder soon drove from poor Elinor all other thoughts and fears. Though she buried her head far down in the depths of the cushioned chair, and stopped her ears in a frenzy of alarm, she could not shut out the prolonged rolls that seemed to shake the house; while the vivid flashes of lightning, penetrating through the coverings she had thrown over her, made her quail each moment. At last, however, the storm began to subside; but then came fresh images of fear. That unconscious helpless form she had seen, the pale face and stained hair, came back to her recollection. What she had said and done too in the first excitement of her grief—the secret she had betrayed—all returned to her remembrance; and apprehensions for the future, mingling with present fears, caused many bursts of tears as she sat alone in her wretchedness. How long she remained there she did not know, for the minutes seemed like hours; and although longing to have her suspense ended, she dreaded too much the confirmation of her worst fears to venture out for intelligence, even after the storm was passing away.

But the door opened at length, and Isabel came in, followed by Percy; and then all thoughts for herself were forgotten in one absorbing fear for another, and she started up, her imploring look speaking volumes, though she could not say a word.

‘Arthur is not dead,’ Percy said coldly, in answer to her beseeching glance. ‘He is not dead, nor as far as we know is he in any danger. He was thrown from his horse, and has broken his arm, and cut his head a good deal, but he is conscious again now. You need not be alarmed about him.’

The tones were frigid in the extreme, but Elinor hardly heeded

them. She burst into tears once more ; tears of relief this time, but they did not seem to call forth much sympathy on his part. He stood by cold and unmoved, waiting until she should recover herself. Isabel, too, said nothing, and from her countenance it was difficult to judge what her feelings were ; but the silence of both appeared to strike Elinor at last, and checking her tears, she said something about going, and began to move towards the door. But she was stopped by her brother.

‘Not just yet. Stay a few minutes, if you please ; I wish to speak to you.’

Elinor sat down ; she was trembling so much that she could not have stood. Her colour came and went, but she did not speak, nor did she notice that Percy was almost as much agitated as herself.

‘I wished to speak to you,’ he said with forced calmness, ‘because I am afraid there has been a great mistake somewhere. You hardly knew before what you were saying ; but, Elinor, I must know what you meant ; whether what you said then was true. Is there anything between you and Arthur?’

Elinor was silent ; her eye went round the room uneasily, as if she would gladly have found some means of escape ; but he had placed himself before her, and it was plain he did not mean to leave her without an answer.

‘Percy, you are not kind,’ she exclaimed at last in great agitation. ‘It is not fair of you to take advantage of what I said at such a time, and try to force my secrets from me.’

‘Elinor, you are trifling,’ he said sternly. ‘Your secret, as you call it, is no secret now to any one who heard you. You have some understanding with him. What is it ? Or has he been deceiving you as well as others?’

‘Deceiving me !’ and she looked up. ‘Arthur deceive me ! No, never ! You don’t know him, or you would not think such a thing. He loves me too well for that. He—I mean’—— She stopped short in confusion.

‘If he has not deceived you, he has others ; and misled them, too,’ he said in a low bitter tone ; and then rousing suddenly into anger, ‘But what has he said to you ? Let me hear all.’

Elinor burst into tears again, alarmed at his tone. ‘We meant no harm,’ she sobbed. ‘We—we’——

‘You what ? What have you been doing ? Are you engaged to him ?’ still more fiercely.

She sobbed, but made no answer.

‘Elinor, I must know. Why will you trifle in this way? Do you mean that it is an engagement between you?’

She nodded. ‘But, O Percy!’ going off into another flood of tears, ‘don’t be angry with him; don’t let them be angry with him at home. He meant no harm; it was only for a time’——

‘No harm!’ in a tone of great bitterness.

‘No, indeed. Was it wrong? It was only for a little time, because he has nothing yet; and because——because mamma might not have liked it. She’——

‘A good reason for doing it,’ was Percy’s remark in intense scorn. ‘Who would have dreamed of a sister of mine acting in such a way!’ He turned from her as he spoke.

Another burst of tears from Elinor. ‘She would have been so angry; Isabel, you know she would. Won’t you say anything for me?’

‘I hate deceit,’ was all the answer her sister vouchsafed. She had stood like a statue during the hearing of Elinor’s confession, but in that moment the whole extent of the dreadful mistake she had made, and of the cruel injustice she had done her cousin, flashed upon her; a new light was thrown upon everything by those few words wrung from Elinor. Her feelings then were not to be envied.

‘I hate deceit,’ she repeated; and Nelly turned from her in despair.

‘You won’t believe me,’ she said. ‘But it is true. It was only for a little time we meant to keep it secret. He was going to have told. I was afraid; but he meant to do it. Indeed he did.’

‘He would have told! But why did he not tell then?’ was Percy’s bitterly indignant answer. ‘What does it matter what he meant to do? You little guess, Elinor, what you and he have done between you!’ His voice shook. ‘Do you know,’ he went on passionately, ‘what all Gainsford is saying of him and Lisa? Yes, of Lisa; what I have heard of them——heard from her first;’ and there was a look at Isabel which brought the colour to her face and the tears to her eyes, ‘and heard from others to-day; this evening only. And I believed it too; fool, madman that I was!’ He turned away again.

Elinor looked at him, and for a moment her sobs ceased. ‘Of him and Lisa! What has Lisa to do with him?’

There was no reply from Percy, but Isabel, whose colour had faded again, and who had resumed her usual collected manner, said coldly—

‘There has been a great mistake ; we have all been deceived. Arthur was at the cottage so often while Percy was away that his visits were noticed. You know, of course, what he went for ; so do we now. But we did not then. You meant to deceive us, and you have done so ; but you have brought most unjust suspicions upon Lisa.’

‘Ah, you confess that now, Isabel, do you ?’ Percy said more bitterly than ever. ‘You own, then, that she has not been so wrong as you thought her, and as you tried to make me think her. As I did, indeed. Yes, thanks to you, I have doubted and made her miserable. Well, it is a pleasure to you no doubt. You have done what you have tried to do ever since you first knew I loved her ; and you have the satisfaction of knowing you have made us both wretched.’

‘Percy, O Percy !’ Her voice was choked ; but he took no more heed of her ; he turned to Elinor.

‘And how long has this been going on between you and Arthur ? When did it begin ?’

Elinor was crying again, but his tone showed that he would not be put off without an answer.

‘It was last August,’ she said at length between her sobs. ‘I promised him then. But—oh, don’t be angry with him,’ in imploring accents.

‘Angry with him ! Much he would care for my anger !’ was the reply. ‘No, I leave that to my father. I have other things to think of now, and what you and he have chosen to do is nothing to me, except in as far as Lisa is concerned ; for her sake I mean to hear everything. She knew of your engagement, I suppose ?’

‘Not at first,’ in the midst of more sobs.

‘Not at first ! Not last year, you mean. But she knew of it while you were at the cottage ?’

‘No, she didn’t—not till—till the day you came home. She found it out then.’

‘Only then ! And when he was there every day ! What did she think he went for ?’

Elinor grew very red. ‘I don’t think she knew he came at all,’ she said at last in confusion. ‘She often used to go and see the child that she is so fond of, and—and’——

‘He watched her out of the house, I suppose. Go on,’ said Percy, in undisguised contempt.

‘I don’t know what else there is to tell,’ said Elinor, crying again. ‘She found it out, that is all.’

‘And said nothing?’

Elinor hesitated. ‘She wanted us to tell, and—and Arthur said he would. He meant to have done so; only I was ill, and she promised then to wait; she said she would wait till I got well.’

‘And you let her sacrifice herself to you, then? To save yourselves a little longer from blame, you could allow her to be exposed to most unjust suspicions. My poor little Lisa!’ in a tone of intense anguish.

‘We didn’t know it,’ Elinor exclaimed. ‘How could we tell any one was suspecting her? We should have told long ago if we had thought that; or if it would have been of any use. But what was the good of speaking when we knew that mamma——’

Percy turned upon her in scorn. ‘What was the good? You to say such a thing as that, Elinor? If you would know, though, the good that fair and open dealing would have done in this case, I can soon tell you. You would have saved Lisa from the worst suspicions that can come on any woman. You would have saved her from the pain and misery of being doubted by one who ought to have trusted her most; and you would have saved me from a world of self-reproach! My little Lisa, my poor child, how I have wronged you!’ he murmured to himself, as a recollection of that evening’s scene—of his angry words and cruel injustice, came back with overpowering vividness; and once more that cry, which he had heard when he left her, rang in his ears. He had not heeded it then, but now all sorts of forebodings were filling his mind.

‘I am going home,’ he said. ‘Isabel, you were ready enough to suspect what was wrong; and the least you can do now is to see things made right again. It was with your friends, I believe, that these false reports originated, and I shall look to you to contradict them. My wife shall not be spoken of again as she has been.’

He did not wait for an answer, and without even another look at Elinor, who sat with her face covered, he left the room.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## A HASTY SUMMONS.

‘FROM the station, miss,’ said a servant at the Priory the next morning, laying a letter before Mary on the breakfast-table. It was a telegraphic message of one line only; an entreaty from Percy that she would come at once. Lisa was ill—dying they thought.

Mary started up; her eye falling on another letter which had come by the regular morning’s post only a few minutes before—a long letter in Lisa’s handwriting; one of her half-weekly budgets, full of news, and bright and cheerful as usual; although, and Mary remembered it now with a pang, some of her latter ones had not been so bright as formerly; she had fancied their tone was not so light-hearted as it had been. Could there have been anything kept back from her? Or what had happened to bring about the catastrophe that caused that hasty summons?

‘What has Lisa been doing?’ was Mrs Tennent’s comment as she read the message. ‘Something imprudent, you may be quite sure. And what was Percy about, too, not to look after her? he might have known better, if she did not. You are going, Mary, I suppose?’

‘Yes, oh yes,’ and Mary started. I wish’—— she looked at her father.

‘You wish I could go too,’ he said, reading her look aright. ‘And I was thinking the same myself. I am not busy just now; I could spare a day or two’—— He thought for a minute or two; Mary watching him anxiously.

She had not long to wait for his decision. He would have sacrificed much for the little niece of whom he was so fond; but as it happened, there really was little at that time to keep him at home. The few patients about whom he was anxious could be given over to a friend; and other arrangements being made, in less than an hour after the message had been received, he and Mary were seated in the first up-train to London. It was a long journey in the heat and dust of that summer’s day; but long and

wearing as it was, its discomforts were thought nothing of in comparison with a delay which took place in town. Their train from the north was behind its time, and in spite of a furious drive across London they reached the other terminus one minute too late; the Gainsford train had just left the station as they drove up to it. When was the next? Not for two hours; and Mary looked after the fast receding line of carriages, and for the first time burst into tears. As long as they had been moving; as long as she had felt she was on her way to Lisa, she had seemed to have no time for thought; but now, what might not that long delay do? She sat down in the waiting-room, hopeless and dejected; while her father fumed and chafed, and spent their two hours of waiting in abusing the railway authorities.

They were off again at length, however; and some hours more brought them to Gainsford, where they took a carriage and drove at once to the cottage. The day was closing in then, and twilight was fast merging into night; the heat had passed away, and the evening breeze was once more freshening the air. There was no one to meet them, and the place was so quiet and looked so desolate, that it struck a cold chill upon both of them, as they made their way up to the front door and rang the bell.

They had to ring twice before it was answered; but after waiting some time a light appeared in the hall, and the door was opened by a servant, who looked out eagerly. It was Lane, and when she caught sight of Mary, who was the first to enter, she uttered an exclamation, 'O Miss Mary!' and burst into tears.

Mary's heart failed her, and she gasped for breath. 'We are not too late, are we? Oh, don't tell me that.'

She looked very white, and Lane, alarmed, pushed a chair towards her, and made her sit down, while she took off her bonnet in the old peremptory manner that Mary knew so well.

'We are not too late?' she repeated, when she could speak again; and Lane shook her head, the tears still running down her face.

'But she won't get over it, Miss Mary. I heard them say they had no hope of saving her. The Major is just out of his mind like, and no wonder, for it's his doing.' She spoke with a vehemence that startled both her auditors. 'There are two doctors with her, and they've sent for another now. We didn't know you were coming, sir.' And Lane, whose faith in her old



master was very strong, looked as if she had something like hope again. 'I'll tell the Major you're here, sir, shall I?'

'Yes—no; never mind, I'll go up-stairs at once,' was the hasty answer; and Dr Tennent strode up the stairs, and Mary was left alone in the hall.

She did not stay there, however; she opened the door of an adjoining room, and finding it empty, took off her bonnet and shawl, and sat down on the sofa to wait till some one should come. Sick at heart, she sat looking with sad and tearful eyes upon all the things around her. She knew them all—every article of furniture, every little ornament; the books, the flowers, the cages of foreign birds, the drawings on the walls—the whole aspect of the place was familiar to her, so often had Lisa described it in her letters, that she might feel at home, she said, when she came to stay there on that happy visit for which so much had been planned, and to which they had both looked forward so long. She was there now; but how different everything was from what they had ever imagined it would be!

The room was in confusion, as it had been left the night before. The piano stood open, and some music had fallen from it, and lay scattered on the floor; papers on the writing-table were in disorder, the flowers in the vases were drooping, and dust was on the books and ornaments upon the table. There stood Lisa's open work-box, too, with her thimble and cotton beside it, her scissors on the ground; while on the sofa where Mary sat was the little frock she had meant to finish, but which had never received its last stitches. There were tears in Mary's eyes as she took it up to look at it; and a bitter pang was in her heart at the thought that it might never be wanted now—that the fingers, too, which had been so busy with it, might soon have done with work for ever.

With a heavy sigh she laid it down again, and as she did so, the opening of a door behind her made her turn. It was her brother who entered, but so changed did he look, so worn and aged by suspense and bitter self-reproach, that had it not been for his tall figure, she might in the dim light almost have failed to recognise him. He did not speak, but she started up and sprang to meet him, and he caught her in his arms and held her tight; though for a long time not a word was said by either. He was the first to break the silence.

'Thank you for coming, Mary,' he said; 'I knew you would.'

His voice sounded strangely unnatural, and tears dimmed her eyes again at the sound of it ; but she remembered she was there to comfort, not to give way to her own grief, and with a strong effort recovered herself.

‘I am so glad you sent for me,’ she said, trying to speak cheerfully. ‘I can be with you as long as you want me.’ She paused for a moment. ‘Dear Percy, she will get over it—you must not give up hope.’

There was no answer. He put her from him, and for several minutes walked up and down the room in silence, but the workings of his face told fearful tales of the anguish within. He stopped at length and said abruptly—

‘You don’t know that it was my doing, Mary? Yes,’ as she looked at him, ‘mine—mine, who loved her more than words can tell ; who would have died to save her from harm. I have done it all. You did not know that, or you would not tell me to hope. You would say I deserve the worst that can come upon me.’

He turned away again, but Mary followed him, and put her arm in his.

‘If it has been your doing, Percy, it has not been your fault, I am sure. No one who knows you would believe that for one moment.’

‘Would they not?’ he exclaimed in great bitterness. ‘No, perhaps not. I should not have believed it myself yesterday ; but it is true for all that. It is my fault from beginning to end, my miserable anger and jealousy have done it all. Lisa, my darling, I deserve to lose you ; and I shall.’

He sat down and covered his face with his hands ; and for some minutes Mary could only stand by him in silent grief, her tears falling fast ; but there were none from him.

‘It was not only last night,’ he went on after a time. ‘It has been the work of days. Has she never said anything to you about it, Mary? Has she never told you how harsh I have been to her lately, poor child? But no, of course she has not ; she would never say a word against me. It is torture to me now to think of it ; but I did not understand then.’

‘It was some mistake, I suppose,’ Mary said gently. ‘How was it, Percy? I am sure you must be blaming yourself too much.’

‘What, for my cruelty to her! Blame myself too much for

that! Impossible! You don't know all—all I said, and did. But I was deceived—wretchedly deceived.' He started, as some sound from above reached them; and for some minutes he paused, and listened with a look of such misery as went to Mary's heart to see; and then he rose and paced the room again, as if in that way he would have worked off his suspense and agitation.

'Yes, I was deceived; it was Arthur's doing. I thought—Mary, you had no idea, had you, that he and Elinor were engaged?'

'Engaged! Arthur! Nelly! What can you mean? Impossible!'

'Is it? Impossible or not, it is true; and it was that misled me, and others too. They kept their secret so well that no one had any suspicion of what they were about. And I heard he had been here so often while I was away those three weeks, that I mistook his motives. Ah, Mary, you may well look at me! You think I might have known better, that I might have trusted her. But I did not, and this is the end of it.'

Mary was silent, too much shocked at first to make any reply.

'Are you sure it is true?' she said at last; 'about Arthur and Nelly, I mean? It seems impossible. I can't believe it of them.'

'Nor any one else; but it is true. Elinor told me herself. Arthur had an accident last night—was thrown from his horse, and in her fright she let out more than she meant. I made her tell me all afterwards; how they had been engaged since last August, and how Arthur—ah, well, never mind how it was; you will hear it from others, and it maddens me to think of it. It is enough that it came out too late. I had been with Lisa not long before, had reproached her with things she had never done, never even dreamed of, poor child! And I had left her without giving her time for one word of explanation. It is agony now to me to think of it, for I might have stayed; I might have listened to what she had to say. But I left her; and now—Mary, it is more than I can bear! I would not care for the child; that might go—but Lisa, my little Lisa, I can't lose her!'

His face was hidden again, but his tone betrayed intensity of anguish; and Mary paused, unnerved by the sight of grief, such as she had never witnessed before. She could only stand and

watch him in silent sadness ; while he, absorbed in the bitterness of his own feelings, seemed to have forgotten her presence—to have forgotten everything indeed—until there came some sound again from above, to rouse him once more from his stupor ; and then he resumed his pacing to and fro, as if in that ceaseless motion only he could find relief from the torture that was racking him. The sadness of that long time of waiting, who could describe ?

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A NEW-COMER.

MORNING was breaking in the east ; its first rays of crimson were streaking the sky and beginning to find their reflection on the grey sea ; and the lamps, which at the cottage all night long had burned bright and clear, were growing dim in the advancing light of day.

In a room adjoining Lisa's a little party was gathered, and the faint glow of the summer's morning fell strangely on faces shadowed with grief and anxiety. Percy was there, worn and haggard, with contracted brow and absent gaze, as if he hardly knew what was passing. Dr Tennent, too, and a clergyman were with him, and by their side was Mary, pale and weary-looking, her head bent down over a little, a very little something that she held in her arms—poor Lisa's seven-months' baby. There were a few prayers read, some water was sprinkled, and then she took back the wailing unconscious child whom she loved already for its mother's sake, and tried to trace in its tiny features some resemblance to that young mother herself, while she sighed to think how much the happiness which it would have brought at any other time was saddened and overclouded now.

For there was but small chance of saving it, the doctors said ; and that Lisa lingered seemed matter of surprise to them. They did not say much, but Mary felt, and knew also that her brother felt, they had little or no hope ; and any she herself might have cherished went too when she stood in the darkened room by her cousin's side, and saw the shadowy outline of the face she loved so well, and which she had last seen in all its beauty, when, a few months before, they had parted from each other at the Priory. Very beautiful it was still ; but its beauty was more like that of chiselled marble than of a living form ; and as she gazed at the colourless cheek, the closed eyes, and the white lips half parted, as if they had opened and there had been no strength to close them, she could have fancied she was watching beside the dead ; while the contrast between that still and silent helplessness and the merry laughing girl whom she had always known, brought such a rush of overpowering feelings that the fear of betraying her presence by a burst of sorrow made her turn away and take refuge in her own room, where her grief could neither be seen nor heard. She need not have been afraid, however, of disturbing her cousin ; for Lisa was too far away in the world of unconsciousness to know that she was there. She was conscious of nothing—not even of her child ; and Percy, who lingered long by her side, was unrecognised. For many hours she lay between life and death ; so weak that every breath she drew seemed as if it must be her last, and so still that the anxious watchers beside her often feared to listen lest they should find she was really gone. The suspense of that long weary day was dreadful, and appeared almost endless. But as evening came on, she struggled back once more to life ; consciousness returned, and to the surprise of every one she began to rally. Her first words then, though she was unable to raise her voice above a whisper, were for her baby ; and when Mary brought it, and laid it beside her, her face lighted up, and a strange smile of almost unearthly beauty for a moment played over it. Mary bent down and kissed her tenderly.

‘You are better, dearest ; thank God for it,’ she said, her voice faltering with the joy of rekindled hope.

Lisa looked at her—a long wistful look, as if she would have liked to speak, but the strength to do so was wanting ; and even the smile with which she tried to welcome her died away. It was checked, for her eye fell upon Percy, who during her long

unconsciousness had never left her side, and who had risen now, and was waiting, longing for her first word—her first glance. But he had not expected the change which the sight of him brought. She was agitated at once beyond all control, and trembled so violently that Dr Tennent was alarmed, not without reason, and told him peremptorily to leave the room.

‘Not one word? Won’t you let me say one word to her—only one?’ Percy entreated, almost heart-broken at this command; but his father was inexorable.

‘Not one, unless you wish to kill her. Don’t you see how terrified she is?’

Yes, it was only too true, she was afraid of him; the little wife whom he had sworn to love and cherish was terrified at his presence; and, to save her life, he must leave her without a word of any kind, without asking for the forgiveness for which he yearned. His punishment was full indeed he felt; and with a look of utter misery on his face, he went away to spend the next long hours alone, with a burden of self-reproach and suspense upon him that was well-nigh intolerable. He never thought of rest, and although it was the third night he had been up, and he knew well enough, only too bitterly, that he could be of no use, he could not rest, but passed his time as he had done before in weary paces to and fro—the long monotony of the hours being only broken by occasional visits from Mary, who stole down-stairs at times to say a few words and try to cheer him. It was not till day was once more dawning, and his father himself came down to tell of the improvement which each hour was bringing, that anything like hope seemed to dawn in his mind. When it did come, when he heard that although there was still danger, yet with care there was a possibility of her recovery, then the wrought-up feelings of those days of suspense and despair gave way, and, completely unmanned, he burst into tears. Burying his face in his hands, he cried like a child, while Dr Tennent stood by, looking as if he found it hard not to follow his example. He had come down intending to speak his mind very plainly on what had happened, and meaning to blame his son most severely for having, by his anger and harshness, endangered his wife’s life; but he forgot to do so now, and after taking several turns to work off his agitation, came up to the back of his chair, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

‘Come, come, Percy, you must not give way like that,’ he said

kindly. 'She will do now, I have no doubt ; you must not distress yourself so much. You have kept up so far, and you must keep up a little longer. She will be spared to you, I hope ; and,' he added gravely, 'you must take more care of her for the future.'

The touch and words recalled Percy to himself ; and ashamed of the weakness he had been betraying, even though it were only to his own father, he made a strong effort to regain self-control, and rose from his seat, muttering something which sounded like an apology.

'You don't know what it has been to me. I had made up my mind so long for the worst, I had so little hope at any time that'—— And once more he broke down.

'Yes, I understand. But the worst is over now, I trust. I have great hope for her. She will want the greatest care though, and must be kept perfectly quiet. You must make no attempt to see her for the present, or I will not answer for the consequences. You saw how agitated she was at the sight of you, and you must keep out of her way for some days at least. It is your own fault, you must remember that,' added the doctor, suddenly recollecting the lecture he meant to have given, and beginning to look very severe.

'Yes, I know it,' humbly and sadly, and with a long sigh. 'You can't blame me more than I blame myself ; God knows I have been bitterly punished for it. You cannot guess what I have gone through the last three days.' And then after a few moments' silence, he said wistfully, 'May I not see her sometimes, if she does not see me? I won't attempt to speak till you give me leave ; but surely I may look at her now and then.'

Dr Tennent, however, would make no promise ; he would have no risks run, he said ; and he added so much about the danger of excitement, that Percy did not try to urge his request. He was worn out too, and now that relief from suspense was come, and the strain which had kept him up was over, he felt how exhausted he was. Flinging himself down just as he was upon the drawing-room sofa, in less than half a minute weariness and grief were forgotten in the soundest of slumbers.

Dr Tennent's anger, when he first heard full particulars of the deception Arthur and Elinor had practised, was very great. When he came to learn everything—the length of time they had kept their secret, the advantage they had taken of Percy's

absence and Lisa's ignorance, and the unjust suspicions their underhand dealing had brought upon their cousin—he was indignant beyond measure. No one ever remembered having seen him so angry as he was then. Arthur should never enter the Priory again, he said; he would have no one there whom he could not trust; and as for the engagement itself, if they had ever chosen to consider it one, it was at an end. He would never give his consent to his daughter's marrying a man who could lead her to deceive her parents; he should take her back with him to Atherstone, and she might consider she had done with Arthur for ever.

And although the doctor, if he had stood alone, would most probably have softened down and forgotten his displeasure after a time, yet every one knew this would not be the case with Mrs Tennent. When, that same afternoon, her father went up to Lassell Lodge to see Elinor, and she heard she was to return home with him, she received the decision as a deathblow to all the hopes she had entertained of the past being forgiven, and her engagement being sanctioned by her parents. She was in a state of prostrate despair, and in floods of tears; and perhaps she could hardly have chosen any more effectual way of mollifying Dr Tennent. If she had made excuses, or attempted to justify herself, his anger might have held out; but when she stood in silence, looking so helpless and forlorn, and crying so very bitterly, there was nothing for him to do but to say his say as quickly as possible, and then, in fear of what his wife's displeasure might be if he allowed himself to be worked upon through his softer feelings, beat a retreat with more precipitation than was consistent with his dignity as father of a family.

Poor Elinor's position at that time was anything but enviable. The full weight of everybody's displeasure fell upon her; for Arthur, although not in actual danger, had so much fever about him, that it was necessary to keep clear of all exciting subjects; and he was, in consequence, in total ignorance of all that had taken place during the last few days. Cut off from all intercourse with him, she felt the separation bitterly, for the whole love of her clinging, twining nature, had been given to him; while Janet's reproaches and Isabel's silent coldness added keen poignancy to her fears and sorrow.

A few days later she left Gainsford. Dr Tennent found Lisa was going on well enough for him to leave her, and he was



wanted at Atherstone again. He went away, therefore, taking Elinor with him ; and a long sad look, that was raised to Arthur's window as they drove off, was her last good-bye for many years to Lassell Lodge and the companion of her childhood.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### PAST AND FUTURE.

IT was some days after his father went before Percy was allowed to see Lisa. Her state was long sufficiently precarious to cause extreme anxiety to those about her, and make it absolutely necessary to avoid everything that could agitate her. That her husband's presence would be likely to do so no one could fail to observe, for she never heard his voice or step, however distant, without trembling ; and even the mention of his name made her change colour, and brought such a frightened beseeching look into her eyes that any subject which had reference to him was obliged to be hastily dropped. That Percy had given her only too good reason to fear him was the impression produced on every one, and great was the indignation felt against him in consequence ; and when she was considered strong enough to bear a visit from him, the doctor thought it needful to give him many severe cautions as to the necessity of keeping clear of disagreeable topics. The words were listened to, but they were scarcely heard, and certainly not resented. All that Percy took in was, that those next ten minutes were to be very precious to him ; and before Dr Mapleston had half finished what he meant to say, he strode away up-stairs three steps at a time, and was in his wife's room.

Poor Lisa was lying back upon her pillows with her baby on her arm ; her young face very wan and white, and a troubled

expression on it which was most painful to see. She raised her eyes when he entered and looked at him longingly, wistfully, but she did not speak; and that sad gaze cut him to the heart. It told a tale of such wrong on his part, such silent suffering on hers. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then the little he had heard of Dr Mapleston's cautions was forgotten. He crossed the room and knelt down by her side.

'Lisa, my darling, I have been very harsh—very unjust to you. Can you ever forgive me?'

Lisa's pale face flushed suddenly. For some moments she looked confused and startled, and it was with an effort that she said at last—

'Forgive you, Percy? I don't know what you mean. It was you who had to forgive, I thought; you were angry with me, you know.'

'Yes, I know it;' and a shadow crossed his face. 'I know it, Lisa, and that is why I want you to forgive me; for I was wrong. I was harsh and cruel to you, my dearest and best. I listened to what others told me—never mind what it was now—but I wronged you. Lisa, will you forgive me?'

It was said imploringly, but once more he had to wait for an answer. But as his meaning appeared to break upon her, and the fear of his displeasure, which had evidently been hanging over her, began to pass away, the troubled look passed from her face also; and when he took one of her hands in his, and, looking at her beseechingly, asked again for the forgiveness for which he was yearning, the smile that broke upon her face was like sudden sunlight.

'Forgive you! Ah, Percy, how can you talk like that?'

'Won't you, my darling?'

'No,' she said, in her own old way; 'because there is nothing—nothing for me to forgive. O Percy, how can you say such things! It isn't right, and I don't like to hear them. It sounds as if you had been wrong.'

'And so I have; very wrong, Lisa; and I am not ashamed to own it. I have done you more wrong than I can ever repair. It is no matter that I was deceived—misled by others. Nothing could excuse my cruel violence to you that night. Ah, Lisa, I was bitterly punished for it when I thought I was losing you; you don't know—you never can know—half the misery of that time. Thank God, you are spared to me a little longer. You

must get well, my darling ; and you shall see how happy I will make you.'

Lisa smiled. 'You can't make me happier than I am ; it would be impossible. Dear Percy, you were always so very kind to me. But are you sure there is nothing now ? Are you really not angry with me any longer ?'

'No, my darling, no. I never ought to have been angry with you at all. Do not think of it now, dearest ; leave it all,' he added hastily, seeing the confused painful look return to her face.

'Yes ;' but she seemed as if trying to remember something. 'Do you know everything ?' she asked wistfully. 'I should like to tell you all, only'——

'I know it, you needn't tell me,' he said, alarmed lest she should be exciting herself too much. 'I have heard everything. Elinor told me.'

'Did she ? Poor Nelly, I'm so sorry for her ! And, Percy, you don't think, then, I was wrong ? I didn't understand that night why you were angry with me ; but—ah, those terrible words !' and she shuddered. 'You didn't mean all you said then, surely ?'

She was beginning to tremble again.

'Won't you forget them, Lisa ?' he said sorrowfully. 'They were cruel and unjust, but they were not true. Won't you believe how gladly I would recal them if I could ? Don't turn away from me, dearest, as if you were afraid of me. Won't you look at me, and tell me you will forget I ever said them ?'

Lisa did look at him, and with a smile. 'I'll never think of them again, if you don't wish it—never ! Why should I ? They were not true, you say.'

'And you forgive me too ?'

She smiled again. 'Ah, Percy, we don't think alike about that. You had a right to be angry, you know, if you thought me wrong. I can't say I will forgive, when there really is nothing to forgive.'

'But there is—a great, great deal. Lisa, dear, make me happy by saying that one word, won't you ?'

But that was more than she could be persuaded to do. Her only answer was to throw her arm round his neck and draw him towards her ; though, if ever kiss told of perfect love and forgiveness, hers did then.

‘And now one for baby,’ she said, looking feverish and exhausted, but very happy. ‘You have hardly seen her yet, and she is such a darling! Yes, that is right; put up your glass, and then you will know her again. She is worth looking at, though she is so tiny. She is very pretty!’ in great admiration.

But when she looked up to see what he was thinking of his little daughter, she found his eyes had come back to herself.

‘Why, Percy, you haven’t half looked at her!’ in a disappointed tone.

‘Haven’t I. But then I have seen her before, you know.’ And he took another survey of his child. ‘She will never come up to you, Lisa,’ was the result of that second inspection; and Lisa looked as dissatisfied as before.

‘I think her very pretty, Percy, and I’m sorry you don’t. Perhaps you will by-and-by when you have seen more of her. Look what a pretty nose and mouth she has, and what long eyelashes! And her eyes! You can’t see them now, because she is so fond of keeping them shut; but I am sure you will think them beautiful when you do, they are so large and dark. Oh, she is really pretty, very pretty indeed; not at all like the babies one sees every day. And I am so very happy to have her!’

There was some excitement in her tones, notwithstanding their extreme weakness; and the flush upon her face told Percy he had stayed quite long enough, even without the doctor’s warning knock, which was heard at that moment. With one more long kiss, he hurried away; afraid lest the meeting which had brought so much happiness to him should have overtasked her small amount of returning strength, and that the doctor’s next report would tell of a falling back from the improvement which had so long been anxiously watched.

But his fears were groundless. Tired out she certainly was for the time; but the feverishness of fatigue passed away without any ill consequences, and each day brought fresh signs of improvement and new hopes to those about her; hopes which were strengthened by her own return to the bright looks and joyous tones of former days.

‘You seem very happy, Lisa dear,’ Mary said one evening when she was sitting alone with her, and they had been silent for some time. ‘What are you thinking of? Something pleasant, I am sure, by your face.’

Lisa smiled. 'Yes, I was—all sorts of pleasant things. I was thinking of Percy for one, and how good he is to me. And then I was thinking of this dear little baby. I can hardly believe, Mary, that she is my own, my very own; to do what I like with, and to take care of and love as long as she lives. And no one can take her from me, can they?' she added, as a vision of forfeited dolls and other lost treasures, the pang of parting with which was still vividly remembered, returned to her mind. 'But, of course, they can't, because she is really mine. Mine and Percy's, and no one else has any right to her. And, of course, too, it's silly of me to think that anybody would take her away, for no one cares for her half so much as I do. But still I feel afraid sometimes—she is such a darling. I think of her so much, Mary; and when I fall asleep I dream about her. And then when I wake it is such happiness to find it isn't only a dream; that she is really here, the most darling, the dearest little thing that ever was.' And Lisa kissed her baby passionately.

Mary looked at her, and for a moment or two there was an expression of deep sadness on her face. The little thing that lay there was so delicate and fragile, and seemed so unlikely to need a mother's care long, that she could not help fearing poor Lisa's happiness in her child would be but short-lived; and it gave her a pang to see how much she was wrapped up in it.

'I always wanted something to pet,' Lisa said, when she had nearly smothered her baby with her kisses; a proceeding which roused that young lady from her slumbers, and caused a good deal of hushing before she could be persuaded to resume them. 'I always wanted something to pet, and I never used to have anything for very long. I was always doing something wrong, and then Aunt Helen took them all away. She took everything away I ever had except Prince. Ah! how glad I was when Percy gave him to me. But a baby, Mary! a real little baby of my own. Oh! she is far, far better than anything else! How glad I shall be when I am well again, and able to do everything for her. I shall never find it lonely now when Percy is away. I did before, especially on field-days, when he was gone for so very long; but now I never shall. I shall wash and dress her, and take her out walking, and do everything for her myself. I only hope Percy won't be jealous,' she added with a smile, 'and fancy I think too much of her. Not that there is any fear of that; for

he must always come first. Mary '—after some minutes' silence —'you are taking good care of him while I am up here, are you not? He seems so out of spirits sometimes that I am afraid he is not well. He quite frightened me the other day, he looked so ill.'

'I don't think he is ill,' Mary said. 'But I don't wonder at his looking so worn as he does, after all the anxiety he has gone through. It was terrible to see him when you were in such danger, Lisa; he reproached himself so much with being the cause of it.'

'Poor Percy, he couldn't help it,' Lisa exclaimed sorrowfully. 'It was all that unfortunate mistake. But now he need never think of it again; it is all over, and we shall be as happy as we used to be. Poor Arthur and Nelly too! I am so sorry for them.'

She lay for a few minutes lost in thought, and then added, 'Do you remember our talk in the old schoolroom at home, Mary, the day before I was married? I want to show you now what a good housekeeper I am, and how well I can manage things. Lane helps me, to be sure, a great deal; but still I think I am getting on by degrees. I hope so; for I do try, really.' She lowered her voice a little. 'You remember what you said to me that same day about trying in the right way? I don't think I have forgotten it; it has helped me very often,' and she looked at her cousin with tears in her eyes. 'I wonder what I should have done without you, Mary. You have always helped me in so many, many ways. Do you know, when I see you sitting by my side, and looking so exactly as you used, I could fancy all those old times had come back, and we were at the Priory together again.'

Mary smiled too. She could almost have fancied the same herself; so unaltered was the fair girlish face before her; and so unchanged was the little Lisa of former days, that it was difficult to realise the fact of her being a wife and mother. She could have imagined the last few months a dream, and her cousin still the child, who at one time had been her all-absorbing care. For some minutes she sat and looked at her in silence till Lisa laid her hand on hers, and asked her what she was sighing for.

'Was I sighing? I did not know it. But I was thinking of you, Lisa; wishing, I believe, that you were my child again. How happy we were in those old days!'

'Very!' and Lisa looked at her cousin gratefully. 'How kind you were to me, Mary!'

'You would not have had me unkind, would you?' said Mary, with a laugh. 'But, my dear Lisa,' she exclaimed suddenly, 'what have you done to your arm? When did you hurt yourself in that way?' She pointed to her wrist, which had evidently been much hurt; and which, although the heavy bruises that had discoloured it were fading away, still looked dark and swollen.

Lisa coloured deeply, and hastily drew down her sleeve.

'It was an accident,' she said. 'It's nothing. I don't feel it now.'

'But how did you do it, and why have you never said anything about it? It must have pained you very much.'

'Did it? I don't remember. There have been other things so much worse that I've forgotten. It will be well in a few days.'

It was plain that enough had been said about it in her opinion; and Mary, perceiving that for some reason she did not want to have any notice taken of it, began to talk of something else. She might have forgotten the circumstance altogether had not Percy himself, the next day, happened, in some unguarded movement of Lisa's, to see and remark on the same bruises. She tried to divert his thoughts from herself to the baby, but her anxiety to avoid the subject attracted his attention, and for a few minutes he sat without speaking, his eyes fixed on the place where her hand had been lying. Then some recollection seemed to come back suddenly, for his face changed, and a look of such sadness—such deep pain—came over it, that Lisa, who was watching him uneasily, saw in a moment he remembered everything. Putting out her hand again, she caught hold of one of his in her impetuous way, and covered it with kisses.

'Dear Percy, don't look like that. It's not worth being sorry about—indeed it isn't. You would never have seen it if I were not so stupid, and always show any little hurts so easily. Mary, please tell him it's nothing—don't let him make himself unhappy. I can't bear to see it.' The tears were in her eyes as she spoke.

Mary was puzzled, and looked at her brother doubtfully.

'Yes, it is all true,' he said sadly. 'It was my doing. I had forgotten the whole of my cruelty that evening; but I remember

it now. O Lisa, my darling, I have treated you shamefully. And the worst of it is, I cannot undo it. As long as I live, there must be the remembrance that I behaved most cruelly to you'——

But Lisa covered up his mouth, and would not let him go on. 'You didn't, Percy; I won't hear you say such things. You were not unkind to me—you were not cruel. You couldn't help that mistake—and you don't think I love you one bit less for it, do you? If I were free now, and could have my choice again, I would come back to you, and think there was no one like you. If you could have thought me wrong, and cared so little as not to make yourself unhappy, I should have felt you didn't love me. But as it is, I know you do love me, and very much too; eh, Percy?' she said, looking at him with one of her shy smiles. 'And I like to know it; it makes me very happy. So don't you see there is nothing to be sorry for—nothing at all.'

But even Lisa's reasoning, convincing as she considered it, could not persuade Percy there was nothing to regret in the past. The look of sadness did not leave his face; and his eye still rested with the same expression of pain on her hand, as it grasped his own.

'Well, if you won't think there is nothing to be sorry for, you can say, at least, we shall never talk of it again.'

He kissed her, but made no other answer; and then, getting up abruptly, left the room.

Lisa looked after him very sorrowfully as he went away.

'Poor Percy!' she said. 'How I wish he would never think of that again. I can't bear to see him looking so grave and sad, as he always does now, just as if he could never be happy any more. Even baby isn't half the pleasure to him. I thought she would be. I heard him give such a long sigh this morning when he had her in his arms; it quite made my heart ache. I wish we could persuade him, Mary, to forget everything, and be like himself again.'

'And so he will in time,' Mary said; 'when he once sees you well again, he won't think of the past. It is his anxiety about you which prevents his forgetting it at present.'

'Ah, well, he won't have long to wait then,' said Lisa brightly. 'If I get on as fast as I have done the last three days, I shall soon be down-stairs again, and then—he won't be miserable any more, for I sha'n't let him.'



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

‘HERSELF A WITNESS OF KINDLY THOUGHT.’

A WEEK or two later, Percy, who had been away at Hoole again for some days, came back to find Lisa dressed for the first time, and sitting on a sofa in her room; looking so much brighter—so much more like her old self, that the sight of her brought an unexpected thrill of pleasure to his heart. A very pretty picture she made, as she sat there in her white wrapper with its bows of pink ribbon, and a softened, shaded light falling on her golden hair and pale delicate features. Very happy too, she looked, as she bent over the baby on her knee; fondling and talking to it in her eager way. And as her eye fell on her husband’s tall figure in the doorway a bright smile and colour lighted up her countenance.

‘Why, Lisa, you look almost yourself again,’ was his greeting, in a tone of such happiness that both smile and colour grew brighter. ‘I didn’t expect to see so much improvement at this, though Mary did send me such good reports. You must take care, dearest, and not run any risk by doing too much. He crossed the room as he spoke.

‘No fear of my doing too much,’ Lisa said, when both she and the child had been kissed at least a dozen times. ‘Mary is so dreadfully prudent—she is always lecturing me about keeping quiet.’

‘And she is quite right; I am very much obliged to her,’ Percy said. ‘She knows how much I prize my treasures, and how thankful I have been to have her to look after them while I was away.’

Lisa smiled. ‘Ah! she is very good to me. I think everybody is very good. Do you know, such a number of people have been to ask after me. And Lane says so many persons stop her when she is out to look at baby, and ask how I am. I am very kind of them, isn’t it?’

‘Very.’ There was something bitter in his tone. ‘It is

the least they can do,' he added, stooping down again over his child.

Lisa looked as if she did not understand him. 'I think it's very kind of them,' she said. 'For we have not been here very long, Percy, and there are not many people that we really know well. Oh, and Mrs Thetford has been—did you know that? She has called several times. I am so glad; because the last time I met Ada I thought she was rather strange, and I was afraid I had offended her. But they were here yesterday, and Lane said she was quite disappointed she couldn't see me. She was delighted with baby, though—she thinks her so pretty. But every one must think that,' said Lisa with great pride. 'Percy,' she added, in a lower tone, 'I think God has been very good to me to give me this dear little baby—and very good, too, to keep me all this time, and make me so happy. I never thought, once, I should be so happy. I thought I was dying. I shall be very glad when I can go to church, and say those prayers; you know which I mean. I can say little prayers at home of course, but it will be much better when I can thank Him there; and you and Mary will go too. You will thank Him with me, won't you?'

Percy kissed her. 'You don't think I have waited for you to go to church, Lisa, to do that,' he said; and then there was a little silence, she looking at her child, and he looking out over the sea, recalling the bitterness of feeling with which, some time before, he had often watched the rise and fall of those same waters—the sparkling of the same sunlight which now seemed so joyous and brilliant.

Lisa broke the silence, rousing him from his reverie by wanting to hear what he had been doing while he was away. After which she had a great deal to tell him in return; and her tones were so joyous, her eye was so bright, that his heart grew light as he watched her—lighter than it had been for many a long day. She saw his face clearing.

'Ah! this is better than the last time you came back from Hoole,' she said. 'What a miserable day that was! And it was my fault—because I was so stupid. Percy,' she added, 'I have never told you anything about that—do you mind my telling you now?' And then, seeing his face change, 'Not if you don't like. I know you don't want to think of it again if you can help; only I should like to tell you about that walk. It

made me so unhappy when you fancied I could do anything you didn't wish; and I have never told you yet that I wasn't really alone—that Arthur was with me.' It was said with some hesitation; and she watched his face anxiously as she spoke.

'I know it,' was all he said.

'You know it?'

'Yes. I heard it afterwards, Lisa,' speaking with an effort.

'Oh!' Poor innocent Lisa! until that moment she had not half understood his allusions on that terrible night of Arthur's last visit to the cottage; but now something seemed for the first time to enlighten her, and her face and neck were dyed crimson in a moment. For some minutes she was silent, sitting with her head bent down over her baby; striving in vain, it appeared, to regain her composure. When she spoke at last, it was without looking up.

'Percy, please let me tell you how it was. I must now really, because I know I have been very wrong. Wrong, I mean, in not being open with you. I want you to hear how it was; and then we'll never talk of it again. May I tell you, please?'

'Tell me anything you like, dearest.' And she did not see the look which told how much he shrank from a revival of those painful recollections. 'Tell me anything you like, dearest, if it will make you happier.'

'I think it will: at any rate, I would rather feel you understood exactly how it was. You know,' going on rather hurriedly, 'I had found out about Arthur and Nelly. I found it out the very day you came home—quite by accident. I'm sure I wish I hadn't; I've often wished so. I went to see little Fanny that afternoon, and when I came back I found Nelly and Arthur together on the garden-steps. I didn't think anything of it till just as I came up; and then I heard him say something—I forget now what it was; but he called her something—his "own dearest," I believe;' and in spite of her embarrassment, Lisa smiled a little. 'And I saw he had his arm round her. Of course, I couldn't help guessing then how it was; and I was very glad, and told them so. I thought Arthur looked very odd when I said it; and by-and-by it came out—that I had found out something I ought not. I was very angry then, Percy. Fancy Nelly having been engaged all those months, and no one knowing anything of it—not even uncle Henry, who is so kind. I can't tell how she could ever think of it, or how Arthur could

ask her; it was so wrong. But when I told them they ought to tell, they said it was impossible, for Aunt Helen would never hear of such an engagement, and therefore it was useless to say anything about it; it would only make her angry for nothing. And then I told them, if they didn't tell, I must; for that if I knew a secret like that, and let him be coming here to meet Elinor, it would be helping to deceive you, and that was a thing I would never do. Nelly cried then; she said I was unkind, for she knew if it came out she should be sent back to Atherstone and never see Arthur again. She left us at last, and ran indoors; and then Arthur and I walked on the beach for ever so long talking about it.'

Lisa gave a sigh as she raised her head, and looked up at her husband for the first time.

'That was our walk, Percy—the walk when you thought I was alone. He wouldn't promise me anything then, but he did afterwards. He came again that afternoon, and told me he had been thinking of it, and that they wouldn't keep it a secret any longer; he would write to Uncle Henry. You came home, Percy, while we were talking; and I was so tired and so vexed that I couldn't help crying. I wasn't sure Arthur would really tell, and I did so hate knowing a secret like that! And then you asked me about that walk—you didn't see both Arthur and Nelly look at me to stop me when I was going to tell you how it was. Nelly looked so imploring, that I couldn't go on—I stopped; and afterwards I didn't know how to explain. I saw you didn't like it, and that made me sorry.'

'My poor little Lisa!'

'Yes, I know I was silly. I was very unhappy at having vexed you; but then I thought it was only for a short time, just till Arthur had written to Uncle Henry, so I tried not to mind it. But the next day Elinor was ill. Ah, Percy, you do not know how miserable I was then! You saw it, didn't you? You asked me sometimes what was the matter with me. I couldn't tell you why I was so unhappy about her; but,' and Lisa's voice dropped, 'I thought if she died, it would be my doing; and it was such a dreadful thought!'

'Poor child!' Percy said, drawing her closer to him.

'You don't wonder I was miserable. O Percy, if I could only have come to you for a little bit of comfort now and then, and have told you how it all was, I should have been so glad! But

I promised Nelly no one should know a word about it till she was well again ; so I was obliged to keep it to myself. When she got better, and Arthur came home, the first thing he did was to come here to see you. He would have told you everything then ; but you were away, you know.'

She stopped, for she saw how Percy shrank from recollections of that night.

'I am so sorry,' she added after a pause, 'that I displeased you so much. You must scold me for it now, please. I am quite well enough to bear anything you like to say ; and you must tell me how wrong I was, and I'll try and be better for the future.'

'Tell you how wrong *I* was, you mean,' said Percy, looking at the pale face and tearful eyes which she raised to his, as if really expecting the scolding she asked for. 'No, Lisa,' with a heavy sigh, 'the best thing we can both do now is to forget it if we can. You have told me all you wanted ; and it only proves to me, what I felt before, how harsh and unjust I was to you. Never mind it now,' he added, as she was beginning an eager, indignant disclaimer. 'You know some of the excuse, such as it was, that I had ; and you know how bitterly I have repented it since. And now let us leave it—let us forget, if we can, that it ever happened.'

There was a touch of peremptoriness in his tone, and for a few moments Lisa was silent ; but she looked up after a time.

'Percy, I want to ask you something. You won't be angry with me, will you?'

'Angry with you, dearest !' He was walking up and down the room with his child in his arms, but paused at her sofa. 'What makes you think such a thing ? You are not so afraid of me, are you, that you should mind asking me anything ?' There was a little sadness in his tone, and she knew what he was thinking of.

'Oh no, no—not that ; only'—— She hesitated. 'I don't want to vex you ; and I'm afraid you will not like this'—— She looked at him again, and he smiled.

'Never mind whether I like it or not, little woman ; let me hear it, at any rate,' sitting down by her side. 'What is it?'

'It is about Arthur and Nelly,' she went on with some hesitation. 'You are not angry with them, are you ? Ah, it's no use asking you, for I see you are—I am so sorry !' Her face

fell; and Percy, who now less than ever could bear to see the slightest shade upon it, moved uneasily, but made no answer.

'I was afraid you were,' she said sadly, 'and it makes me so sorry! I know you have a great deal to forgive—far more than any one else; but still I hoped'—— Her voice was faltering. 'Only think how unhappy they are.'

'Very probably,' he answered. 'People are generally sorry when they bring trouble on themselves. I wouldn't give much for that kind of sorrow, Lisa.'

'But it isn't only that with them. You must remember they had made up their minds to tell all before it came out as it did if Arthur had not had that accident, you would have heard everything. O Percy, they were wrong—but every one is wrong at times; and if they meant to do right'——

'I have nothing to do with that,' was the answer. 'What they meant to do is no affair of mine. It was never done; and whether it ever would have been, whether they really intended what they said, no one can tell now. I can only go by what they did, and, unfortunately, actions are truer interpreters of men's intentions than any words can be.'

'But, Percy, do you think it right to doubt a person's good intentions always because they have failed once? Wouldn't it be better to trust them, and try to think that, though they have been wrong, they may still wish to begin right again? You said yesterday that very likely we may have to go out to the Cape this autumn. Will you go away without speaking one kind word to them, or letting them think you have forgiven them? It would be so very hard if you did.'

Percy was silent; he sat looking at his child without raising his head.

'I know they were wrong,' Lisa said; 'but who isn't wrong sometimes? And then, think what it is for them to have to give each other up, and to know that perhaps they may never meet again. O Percy, if I had been in Nelly's place, and afraid of losing you, I might have done as she did. I can't tell. I was never tried.'

'Never, Lisa, never; you are wronging yourself. You never would have acted as they did. And you must remember that whatever they have to bear, they have brought on themselves. They cannot be surprised if they get more blame than pity.'

He spoke sternly, and Lisa made no answer. But when, after a long pause, Percy looked up, he saw that her eyes were full of tears. He was seized with compunction at once.

‘Why, Lisa, my darling, I have not made you cry? Don’t do that, dearest,’ in great distress. ‘You are not going to make yourself unhappy about those two, are you? Are you thinking me very hard and unjust because I can’t think of them as I used to do?’

‘Not exactly unjust,’ Lisa said, struggling to speak clearly. ‘But still I—I wish you could think differently. And I couldn’t help thinking too, that if they’re to be judged so hardly for this one wrong thing, what will become of me, who am always doing wrong. There will be no chance for me, I am afraid.’

‘No chance for you, my poor child? Why, what have you ever done?’ was Percy’s answer, murmured more to himself, however, than spoken aloud; and then he fell into a deep reverie. ‘But what do you want me to do, Lisa?’ he asked at length.

Lisa looked up, but it was very shyly, though her eyes brightened. ‘I don’t know exactly; only—I thought that—that perhaps’—— Her shyness was increasing. ‘Don’t you think you might go and see Arthur? He would like it so much, I am sure; for, poor fellow, he is very lonely. Mary went up to the Lodge the other day, and found him all alone; and—and she made me so sorry for him. I am sure he feels it all very much; and she says, Percy, that he thinks more of you than of any one, because—you know why’—— and her colour deepened. ‘I am afraid he thinks you can never forgive him.’

Percy was silent; but he looked at Lisa’s pleading face, and then at the sleeping child upon his knee, and for a long time he sat lost in thought. For some minutes she watched him anxiously; but he turned round at last, and smiled then as he met her gaze.

‘And you want me to go and see him, do you? But, Lisa, I can’t; he is gone.’

‘Gone!’ and her face fell again. ‘Ah, yes, Mary told me he was going. Colonel Crawford has another tutor now for his boys. But where has he gone?’

‘I don’t know. But it is not for long, dearest,’ seeing her disappointed look. ‘He will be back in a week or two, I believe.’

‘And you will see him then ? Dear Percy, thank you,’ as he smiled. ‘How good you are !’

‘Not very good, Lisa ; it is only what you say I ought to do,’ he answered lightly.

‘But it makes me very happy,’ she said, with a look which made his face brighten, and then the subject was dropped.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ‘LET THE DEAD PAST BURY ITS DEAD.’

It was one sunny afternoon in August, that Lisa was lying on a sofa on the garden lawn, under the shade of an acacia-tree—the same tree beneath which she and Arthur had sat together on just such another sunny day, in quite the early summer—on that day which had been to her the beginning of so many troubles.

It was a warm bright afternoon now, as it had been then, with sunshine on sea and land, with the deepest of deep blue skies seen through the pale green leaves, and all around a murmur of pleasant sounds—of the falling tide, of the chirp and hum of bird and insect, of the chime of distant bells from some village church across the bay. It was just such an afternoon when to lie there doing nothing would have seemed the perfection of enjoyment. But Lisa did not appear to have found it so. She had been alone a long time, both Percy and Mary being out ; and even her baby was away, Lane having taken her to the beach ; and as she lay there in undisturbed solitude, she looked tired and very sad. There was a book in her hand, but she was not reading it—her head was resting back upon her pillows ; but although her eyes were closed, there was no expression of repose upon her face. On the contrary, it wore a painful look, which showed that whatever her thoughts might be, they had not brought the happiness that might have belonged to such a



summer's day. The sound of steps upon the gravel walk, after more than an hour had gone by, made her look up hastily, and the sad expression was gone from her face in a moment. In its place there came a smile.

'O Percy, I am so glad you are come!' but she stopped short, for it was not her husband who was coming towards her. She looked again. Could it be? Yes; though the sunlight was in her eyes, she saw in a moment who it was: paler and thinner than before; but there was no mistaking him—it was Arthur; and the deep crimson colour mounted to Lisa's face as she recognised him. For a minute he seemed almost as much embarrassed as herself.

'I beg your pardon, Lisa; I didn't know you were alone,' he began with some shyness—a most unusual thing with him. 'I thought Percy was always at home at this time.'

'Never mind,' Lisa said, trying to shake off her own embarrassment. 'He will be here directly.'

'He asked me to come,' Arthur said. 'I only got back this morning; and I found a note at the Lodge from him, so I thought I would call. Didn't he tell you he had written?'

'No,' and Lisa looked infinitely relieved. 'But I am very glad to see you, Arthur, though I didn't expect you. Where have you been all this time?'

'Staying with some friends at Ryde. It was a chance I came back here at all. I thought you had all thrown me overboard, and I intended to keep out of your way. But I heard from Colonel Crawford yesterday, asking me to come over and see his brother about an engagement they wanted me to make; and then at Lassell Lodge I found Percy's note. I—well, never mind, I didn't know he'd have written as he did; and so,' he added, with a smile, 'here I am.'

Lisa smiled too. 'I am so glad!' but, warmly as she spoke, both felt there was some constraint between them.

'You are not quite well yet, are you, Arthur? You don't look so,' she remarked, after a long pause.

'Don't I? But a fellow can't get such a knock on the head and not feel it for some time. Not that it was that unlucky tumble, though, that did it all. I should have got over it much sooner if it hadn't been for'——

'Thinking of Nelly, I suppose,' said Lisa, with some hesitation, as he paused. 'Poor Nelly!'

There was a sigh from him. ‘Yes, there was the thought of her, and all I had brought upon her; and then they told me of you, Lisa.’

‘I am very, very sorry,’ Lisa exclaimed. ‘You don’t know, Arthur, how sorry I have been for you all along.’

‘Sorry! have you?’ and he looked up with rather a melancholy smile. ‘I should have thought you would have been angry, not sorry. You have suffered enough through me. I don’t think I deserved much pity from anybody, and I wasn’t surprised I didn’t get it from most of them. They had a right to be angry, I know; and my uncle, perhaps, more than any of them. He was bitter enough, certainly, and didn’t spare me in any way; or rather my aunt didn’t: for it was her doing, of course. Well, I deserved it all, I suppose; but I can’t say I felt it any the less for that. For, selfish and inconsiderate as I was in my treatment of Nelly, I did love her, Lisa. I love her still—all the more because I have lost her for ever.’

‘I don’t believe it is for ever,’ Lisa exclaimed. ‘I won’t believe it. She loves you, Arthur; you know she does, as well as you love her. And by-and-by—in a few years, when you have a home to give her, Uncle Henry won’t refuse his consent. You will be married some day; see if you are not.’

Arthur shook his head. ‘You didn’t see his letter, or you would know how impossible it is. My aunt made him write it, I know; but it comes to the same thing. No,’—and there was a dreary sigh,—‘I know I have no chance; and it is better to face the thought and have done with it, rather than be always clinging to hopes that must come to nothing.’

‘And you mean to forget her, then,’ Lisa said, half reproachfully.

‘I said nothing about forgetting—I can’t do that,’ was the answer; and there was a long silence, which was not broken until voices were heard approaching, and Mary and Percy turned the corner of the house. Then Arthur started up, but he did not go to meet them; and as he saw Percy’s glass raised to ascertain who the visitor was, and heard Mary’s exclamation of astonishment, he stood for a moment, looking so very awkward that, although her own embarrassment was almost as great, Lisa could not help pitying him. His awkwardness diminished rapidly, however, when Mary ran forward to meet him; and it vanished altogether before Percy’s hearty shake of the

hand, and his 'Ah, Arthur, how are you? I'm glad to see you.'

The words did not say much, and the tone as little; but that warm shake of the hand was more expressive, and Arthur was restored to ease at once.

'He thought he should have found you at home,' Lisa said. 'But you are late to-day, are you not?'

'Yes, rather; I was kept; but it's all right, dearest. I asked him to come:' and there was a grave smile on his face as she raised her eyes to his with a whispered, 'I was so glad to see him again, Percy.'

That smile was gone, however, when, after a few common-places had been exchanged, he and Arthur, as if by mutual consent, found themselves moving off towards one of the side-paths, where perhaps they felt they could speak more freely of what both would be glad to get off their minds.

'I never had one thought towards her which you might not have known,' were Arthur's first words then, and they brought a shadow over Percy's face. It was with something of sadness in his tone that he said, almost humbly—

'I know it, Arthur. I might have trusted both you and her more. Will you forgive me?'

It was all that ever passed between them on the subject; for Arthur, who had come half expecting reproaches, was deeply touched by the tone in which those few words were spoken, and could only grasp his cousin's hand in silence. They talked long afterwards, as they paced backwards and forwards on one of the gravel walks, but it was not of that; it was done with and dismissed for ever. Their conversation had the effect of raising Arthur's spirits; and when they returned to Lisa's sofa, he was far more like himself than when he had first come in. They got back as Lane made her appearance with the child in her arms, and Lisa called to her.

'Arthur has never seen baby yet,' she said. 'He will like to see her, I am sure.' And Percy himself strode off to fetch the child.

'There's your piccaninny,' he said, laying it in Lisa's lap. 'And now, Arthur, do your duty, and admire her properly. If you like large babies, you won't think much of her, for I believe she is about one of the smallest specimens of the genus that ever was seen. But Lisa says that is all the better: she considers

large babies common and plebeian, and thinks this one greatly improved by being such a dot.'

The 'dot' had a tiny hand clutched very tight round one of his fingers as he knelt by the side of the sofa; and the action, while it held him prisoner, gave him an excuse for admiring her to his heart's content, even if Arthur could not be persuaded into doing the same.

'But he really must—he can't help it,' Lisa cried. 'She is such a beauty. Look at her, Arthur; come round here, you can't see her there,' she exclaimed eagerly; and Arthur came round accordingly, being secretly puzzled to discover in what the difference consisted between this particular specimen of babyhood and those that might be met with anywhere; but he was wise enough not to say so, and after some contemplation of the little article, during which Lisa expatiated largely on its various beauties, he remarked—

'Well, it's a pretty little thing, certainly. I shouldn't wonder,' making a dash at a compliment, 'if it were to grow up very good-looking—something like you.'

Lisa pouted. 'How stupid you are, Arthur! That is such half-and-half praise. And why do you call her "it"? as if you were not sure whether she were a boy or a girl.'

Arthur laughed a little. 'To tell the truth, I was not quite sure,' he said; 'for I didn't hear whether you talked of him or her. But it's a "she," is it? And what is its name?'

'Lisa Mary. Not very pretty is it? Mary Isabel would have been much prettier. But it was Percy's doing. We shan't call her Lisa, though; for I don't want her to be like me—a naughty good-for-nothing thing. She must grow up something much better.'

'Not a Scaramouch, I suppose?' said Arthur, with one of his old looks; and as Lisa laughed, he added, 'Well, it seems queer certainly to see you setting up for a mother. Are you sure it's not a mistake?'

'Ah, you think I am not old enough to take care of her,' Lisa said, a little sorrowfully. 'Everybody seems to think so. But I shall. I love her so much that I am sure I shall learn to be a good mother. And you know I shall not always be so young as I am now. Perhaps some day I may turn out quite good and wise like Mary; who knows?' she said with a smile.

Arthur was silent. He was struck at that moment by the

extreme delicacy of Lisa's appearance ; and while she was speaking, he had been thinking more of that than listening to what she said.

As she sat bending over her baby, he looked at her wasted and almost transparent hand, and at her thin face, where the fitful colour came with the exertion of speaking, and then, fading away when she was silent, left it as white as the dress she wore ; and a most painful feeling came over him. The fragile delicate look of both mother and child brought a sudden misgiving to his mind ; and he glanced involuntarily at Percy, expecting to see the same fear reflected in his face. But Percy was too accustomed to Lisa's appearance to notice anything amiss ; and Arthur, relieved by his unconcern, dismissed as groundless the almost nameless dread which for a moment had taken possession of him. It returned, however, in spite of himself many times during the evening ; and not understanding how soon those about an invalid become accustomed to symptoms which strike a stranger so forcibly, he wondered how Percy, wrapped up in her as he was could fail to notice the languor and exhaustion which stole over her from time to time, and which all her high spirits could not conceal. So apparent was it that he could not help remarking on it, and saying that she did not seem to be getting up her strength very fast. Lisa's look at him, however, as he made the observation, though he did not understand it, was such an imploring one that he stopped suddenly.

'I am a great deal stronger than I was some time ago,' she said hastily. 'But this happens to be one of my bad days. Baby was very cross all morning, and that tired me out. She is not always so, though, and some days I am much better ; I shall be quite strong again soon.'

'Yes, she only wants change of air now,' Percy said. 'Dr Mapleston won't let her travel yet ; but directly he says she may go, I shall take her down to Atherstone. A month there will set her up again—won't it, Lisa ?'

She smiled. 'Yes, I am sure it will. Why, only thinking of it almost makes me well. It will be such a pleasure to see the dear old Priory and everybody again !'

Arthur's prospects were then discussed, and much was said of the engagement he had made to go abroad as travelling tutor for some months, of his intention of returning to England for a few days in October to go up for his voluntary, and his hopes of

being ordained in the spring—of all of which he talked unreservedly, though not so lightly as he would have done a short time back. Lisa was struck by the difference in his tone, and she liked him all the better for the change.

‘When shall we see you again?’ she asked, as he rose at length to take leave.

‘I don’t know. I must be off to Ryde to-morrow for a day or two, and I don’t suppose I shall be able to get down here again before we leave England. But I shall try and run down when I come back in October.

‘I hope you will come,’ she said with a smile. ‘And, Arthur, I am very glad you have been here to-day ; I should have been so sorry if you had gone away and thought we had all given you up ! You won’t mind waiting for Nelly now. I feel sure you will see her again some day, and you will both be very happy.’

He made no answer, but he took the hand she held out to him ; and, as if moved by some sudden impulse, raised it to his lips.

‘Good-bye, Lisa—God bless you !’ was all he said, and turning away hastily, the next moment he was gone.

He left Gainsford on the following morning ; and a few days later he went abroad. But in other lands, and amidst foreign scenes, that look and smile of hers long haunted him ; and in after-years, when other memories were fading, they were with him still.

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## CHAPTER XL.

## A VOICE FROM THE QUIET LAND.

It was strange that the fears which had startled Arthur had never suggested themselves to Percy. It never seemed to strike him how slow Lisa's fancied recovery was. Casual acquaintance who came to the house saw the change which each day made in her appearance; but while they pitied the husband who could so blind himself to what was passing before his eyes, there was not one to tell him that the hopes on which he was building must sooner or later fade away.

Even Mary was as much deceived as he was, and accustomed to the weakness which she had so long witnessed, did not think so much of it as she would have done had she seen it for the first time; while Lisa's own high spirits contributed in no small degree to keep up the deception.

Mary was the first of those around her, however, to wake up to the realities of the case; and although for some time she was slow in taking in the full extent of her cousin's danger, the knowledge of it came upon her by degrees, and only too surely. For a short time, indeed, she still doubted and hoped on, trusting that she might yet be mistaken; but as she watched Lisa's daily increasing languor, and mentally contrasted her small amount of strength now with what it had been even a week or two before, she could at last no longer doubt, and the truth of all her worst convictions gradually forced itself upon her mind.

It was a terrible blow to her; and when she heard from Dr Mapleston, whom she questioned on the subject, that her fears were only too well founded, she was completely overcome. The thought of losing her little Lisa was too much for her, and her grief at first was beyond control; many bitter tears being shed in solitude before she could learn to face her sorrow, and gather strength for the trial that was slowly but surely coming. Very hard, too, it was to keep her grief to herself; and harder still to wear a cheerful face, and hear hopes spoken of which she knew now could never be realised. Happily, however, this part of her

trial would not last long, for Lisa, she knew, ought to be prepared for what was coming; and much as she shrank from the task of telling her what her danger was, she felt she ought not to let her go on deceiving herself.

But both that day and the next her cousin was better, and, as usual on such occasions, was in almost wildly extravagant spirits; and she played so merrily with her baby, and talked so gaily to Percy, that Mary found it impossible to cast a shadow upon their happiness. She almost felt, indeed, as if she were mistaken; so impossible did it seem that anything so bright and full of life as her cousin looked was, in truth, fast passing away.

But the following morning was sultry in the extreme; and Lisa lay upon the sofa in her own room, working, indeed, and making every effort to appear as well as she had been the two last days; but with such a look of languor about her, that it was evident she was only overtaking her strength: and as Mary sat by her side, and saw the hectic flush upon her face, and felt her burning hand, her fears came back again, and she began once more to realise how little hope there was of their proving groundless.

‘Why don’t you leave off, and rest a little, dear Lisa?’ she said at last; ‘and then you will be fresh for Percy in the afternoon. He won’t like to see you looking as you do now when he comes home.’

‘Looking as I do now, Mary? What do you mean?’ she said, a little petulantly. ‘I look very well, I am sure; for I asked Lane to give me the glass just as you came in, and I had quite a nice colour. I can’t imagine why you should fancy there is anything the matter with me.’

‘Only because you look so tired, dear,’ Mary said, with a faltering voice. ‘I don’t think you can be very strong’——

‘It’s so hot!’ Lisa interrupted. ‘It is that makes me feel so tired. Do you know, Mary, I think it is hotter than it has ever been,’ and she gasped for breath. ‘There is no air anywhere. How would it be if we opened that other window as well as this?’

Mary did as she was asked; but the change did not appear to make much difference in the temperature of the room, and Lisa looked more and more exhausted.

‘I don’t think I shall get stronger till the weather is cooler



again,' she said. 'I am very sorry, because Percy is so anxious for us to get to Atherstone. He thinks I should get well directly there; and I think so too. But Dr Mapleston is so tiresome—he is always saying, "Wait a little longer."'

'And he is right, dear Lisa,' Mary said. 'You couldn't bear the journey.'

'Not as I am just now, perhaps; but I am not always like this. I was better yesterday. I shall be better again this evening, when it is not so hot. No one can tell what my strength is on a day like this. The heat tries everybody.'

Mary was silent for a moment. 'And do you really think, Lisa dear, that you are stronger than you were a short time since—than you were perhaps a fortnight ago?' The words came out before she thought what she was saying.

Lisa looked at her. 'What do you mean, Mary?' she asked uneasily. 'A fortnight ago! I really don't remember—that is so far back. I am not so strong, perhaps, this morning as I was yesterday; but that is nothing. I shall be better again this evening.'

'You are always better in the evening,' Mary said, with a sigh.

'Well, and that is a good thing, isn't it?' Lisa answered; but although she spoke lightly, her eyes were fixed uneasily on her cousin. 'You don't think it a bad sign for me to be better then, do you?' she asked, anxiously.

'I don't know,' and Mary kissed her. 'But—it seems very little use for you to be better then, if you are worse again every morning.'

'Not every morning—only sometimes. And it is no wonder to-day; do you think it is?' And as no answer came, Lisa looked up again. There were tears in Mary's eyes, which she was trying in vain to hide. 'I don't understand you, Mary; you are very strange. And you don't look like yourself. Do you mean you are afraid'——

She stopped; a strange look came over her face; and after a few moments' silence there was a piteous cry, and she started up.

'Mary, Mary, you know it! Is it true? Tell me it isn't. Tell me I may stay a little longer—that I needn't leave you all. For I can't go yet! indeed I can't. Ah, God forgive me! I don't know what I am saying. For I must—I know I must.'

She sank back again on her pillow, and burst into passionate tears.

Mary knelt by her side, and soothed her tenderly. 'Dear Lisa,' she said in her gentle voice—and its quiet tones insensibly stilled that paroxysm of grief—'Dear Lisa, don't cry like that. You must not—it will only make you worse. And you must remember, my darling, that my knowing it will make no difference—it will not bring it any nearer. But it will let us talk together of it, and help you to bear it better. Dear Lisa, won't you be calmer?' she whispered, as the sobs still continued, though less wildly than before. 'Won't you be calm, and not make yourself ill, for Percy's sake? You don't want to make him unhappy, I am sure.'

'Make him unhappy!' and she raised her head. 'Ah, Mary, that is why I have kept it to myself. For I have known it so long—so very long. I felt I was getting weaker. I knew long ago I should never get well; but I tried—I tried to make him think I should. I tried to make myself out better than I was, that he might not guess the truth. I knew it would make him so unhappy if he did, and I couldn't bear to see him so. And yet I wanted to tell him; for I longed—oh, you can never guess how I have longed—to talk to some one about it.' She sobbed convulsively.

'My dearest Lisa, how I wish I had known it! But I guessed nothing of it until lately; and I never thought you had any fears yourself. You always seemed so hopeful and cheerful.'

'No, I wasn't—I was frightened and miserable.' And she shuddered. 'Sometimes I felt as if I must tell Percy—as if I couldn't keep it to myself any longer. And then, when I had made up my mind to begin, he would look at me as he often does, and smile as if he were so glad to see me better—and then, Mary, I *couldn't* tell him. I was obliged to smile too, that he mightn't know what I really felt. You can't tell how I dread to see him unhappy; and yet I know he must be some day—very soon indeed now; for I shan't be here long—I know it quite well.' And Lisa covered her face with her hands, and cried again most bitterly; while Mary's own tears fell fast.

'If he would only see it!' Lisa said at last. 'For I feel as if I could never tell him—and yet I must. It will make it so much worse for him if he is not told it soon. And I should not

like any one else to tell him—not even you, Mary ; for I think he won't find it so hard to bear if he hears it from me.'

'You had better not try,' Mary said, through her tears. 'Leave it to me, Lisa dear. It is time, as you say, he knew it. But you must not try to do it yourself ; you are not equal to it.'

'Yes, I am, and I would rather tell him. He will feel it less, I know, coming from me ; and I want to save him as much as I can. O Mary, you don't know what he has been to me ; and when I think of leaving him and my darling little baby, I feel as if my heart would break. And though I ask to be helped to bear it patiently, somehow I can't. It seems as if I thought of them more and loved them all the better because I shall be with them such a little time. I wish I could feel differently, Mary—I wish I could feel it is best for me to go.'

Mary kissed her tenderly. 'And so you will, dearest. When the time comes, you will feel it is right, and you will be able to give them up ; though it is so hard now. It must have been harder still when you were keeping all this to yourself. My poor Lisa, I wonder how you did it.'

'I don't know now how I did,' Lisa said, with a sigh. 'And it seems so very long since I first knew it. I have been very miserable, Mary dear. I wonder Percy never found it out ; but he guesses nothing even yet. I must tell him, though. I don't think it will be quite so hard, now I have talked to you.'

'I wish you would let me do it,' Mary said again. 'It would save you a great deal of pain, dear Lisa.'

'Yes, so it would, perhaps, but what I want is to save him. A little pain more or less can't matter much now for me—it will all be over soon. But it does matter for him ; he will have to bear it so long. You will stay with him, Mary, won't you, and try to comfort him ? for I know he'll be very lonely when his little Lisa is gone. And you will take care of baby, too. She won't want a mother while you live, I know that. It was the first thing I thought of when I knew I must go. I hope she will be a much better child to you than I used to be. Ah, how I wish those days could come back again ! Do you think they are quite gone—gone for ever ? Is my life really over ? I can't believe it !' and her look grew wild again. 'Mary, I *must* live. I can't die yet. Can nothing save me ?' She clung to her cousin convulsively.

Poor Mary's agitation was extreme, almost as great as that of

the frightened child who held her so beseechingly ; but she struggled against her feelings, and after a time her gentle soothing seemed to restore Lisa to some degree of calmness. Her convulsive grasp relaxed, and her passionate sobs became less violent.

‘I know it’s wrong, but I can’t help it. I would give all I have for one year more—only one! I have been so very happy the last few months ; and it’s so hard to go now, just when baby is come. I wonder sometimes what makes me so miserable ; often I wake in the night and think something has happened ; and I look for baby, and I look for Percy, and they are both there—they are safe and well ; it’s only myself. I remember then how it is—that I am dying—that in a very little time I shall not be here any longer. O Mary, you don’t know what it is to feel it.’

And shuddering and trembling, she clung once more to her cousin ; till, worn out at last, she sank into a kind of stupor, from which, now that there was no motive for exertion, she did not rouse herself all the morning. But the strain came back when Percy returned ; and Mary was startled then at the change in her manner—the more so because she began to comprehend how much the fever produced by such unnatural excitement must all along have been consuming her little strength. That Percy should know the real state of the case, and understand how necessary perfect quietness was that Lisa’s life might be prolonged at all, was now her one wish. But Lisa herself seemed, as she had so often done before, to lose the courage to undeceive him. Instead, her cousin was startled by hearing her prefer a most unexpected request.

‘I wish we could go up on the hill somewhere, Percy,’ she exclaimed, when something was being said about the heat. ‘I am sure if I could get the breezes up there, I should be much stronger. Couldn’t we find some lodgings on the East Hill ? I should like it very much.’

‘Would you, dear?’ he said, catching eagerly at anything to give her pleasure. ‘Then I’m sure we’ll go. I’ll walk up now—it’s not too late ; and then you can go as soon as you please.’

And acting on the idea at once, he set off on his search.

‘Ah, Mary, you think me very foolish,’ Lisa said, when he was gone. ‘You think it can do no good. But it can—it must ; it’s only fresh air I want. I saw the elm-trees at the back of

the house when Percy was carrying me down this evening, and they looked so cool and breezy! The wind was tossing their top boughs about, and then it seemed to go playing off among those hills; and I felt directly that if I could go up there, I should be better. It is worth trying, at any rate; and if I could feel strong for a few days only, I think I should be happy. Mary dear, I must go.'

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### BEYOND RECAL.

It was on that same evening that Janet and Isabel returned from a visit they had been paying to some friends for a few days, and the first thing they heard from Mrs Thorpe was an account of Lisa's illness and danger.

'I have not seen her myself,' she said; 'but I hear from every one how dreadfully she is altered lately, and I know Dr Mapleston says she cannot live long. But the worst of it is, nobody about her seems to have any idea how ill she is. I don't believe she is aware of it herself, and I am sure Major Tennent is not. It is strange how he can blind himself in that way, and a pity there is no one to undeceive him; for she is dying—there is no doubt of it.'

'Lisa dying!' The words fell on Isabel's ear with a cold dull shock. Dying—the cousin whom she had slighted, despised, and so deeply injured by her false suspicions—was she dying before she had been able to repair the wrong she had done, or to efface, as she had hoped, by care and affection, the memory of many a former unkindness and injustice? And her brother! Was the happiness she had grudged him to be so short-lived?—was his home henceforth to be desolate? Surely

it could not be—the thought was too dreadful. There was some mistake, and so she would find. Mary must know ; and Mary had written to her during her absence, and had not hinted at such fears as those of which Mrs Thorpe spoke. She could not be deceived too ; and so thinking, Isabel tried to put away the miserable misgivings that came crowding over her. But she could not lose them ; all night long, during hours of wakefulness, Lisa's face was before her. She saw it shadowed by a mournfulness which was exaggerated by the silence and solitude around ; and if for a few minutes she lost the recollection of it in sleep, it was only to dream of her cousin as she had been in days gone by, full of life and loveliness ; and then to awake again to remember that she was dying.

She went down to breakfast the next morning pale and unrested ; and Janet was not long in remarking her looks.

'You are thinking of poor Lisa, I suppose,' she said ; 'but I can't help hoping there is some mistake. We will go down to the cottage after luncheon, and see her.'

'After luncheon ! I am going now,' Isabel said. 'I shall go directly breakfast is over.'

Janet looked surprised, but she said nothing ; and half an hour after, Isabel had put on her bonnet, and was on her road to the cottage.

It was another sultry day—even the trees in the lane could not keep off the heat, and the sea lay so still that the break of its waves on the beach was scarcely heard to bring a sound of freshness to the ear. Among its sheltering trees and shrubs the cottage stood, cheerful and pretty-looking as ever—its green creepers twining over it—the sunlight basking round it—its gay garden beautiful with summer flowers. No outward signs there of the change that had come upon it—nothing to tell of the young life that was ebbing away within its walls. On the gravel walk before the house Prince was lying half asleep, and under the shade of the large acacia on the lawn Mary was at work with the baby on her knee. Everything was quiet and home-like, but upon Isabel's heart there was a weight like lead, and when she joined her sister, she could not speak ; she knelt by her side in silence, gazing long and sadly at the sleeping child.

'I have brought her here to be out of Lisa's way,' Mary said. 'Lane is busy packing, for we are going up to the East Hill for a few days. Percy has taken a lodging there,' she added. 'Lisa

wished to go—she thought the change would do her good ; but—she is very ill now.’

‘And you never told me, Mary,’ Isabel faltered. ‘I knew nothing of it ; oh, why didn’t you tell me?’ in a tone of reproach.

‘I couldn’t, dear ; I hardly knew it myself. And Percy does not know it even yet—he still thinks she is getting better. I don’t know how he will bear it,’ she added with a sigh. ‘I dare not think of what it will be to him—he is so wrapped up in her !’

Wrapped up in her ! Yes ; Isabel knew that—she could guess something of the dreariness and desolation that must be his lot when his wife was gone ; and she shrank from the thought that the untold bitterness of such sorrow must in some measure be laid at her door.

‘Can I see Lisa ?’ she said at last, getting up. She was very pale, but Mary was too busy with the child, that was moving uneasily in its sleep, to notice her.

‘Yes ; she is in her own room resting. But don’t stay long with her, dear Isabel ; she is not strong enough to talk much, and she is very tired ; she had hardly any sleep last night.’

‘I won’t stay many minutes,’ Isabel said, in a low, husky voice ; and she walked away with slow and hesitating steps, very unlike her usual decided tread and lofty bearing.

Slowly she went up-stairs, and as slowly she approached her cousin’s room—the door of which stood open ; but when she reached its threshold, she paused—uncertainty of what her reception might be keeping her back. Lisa was not resting, as Mary supposed ; she was sitting on her sofa near the window—her head upon her arms, which were folded on a table that was drawn up beside her, and her attitude told most painfully of utter abandonment to grief. As Isabel paused, she heard a low sob break from her, and saw her shiver from head to foot in the agony of suppressed anguish. Nor was it hard to guess the cause of that sorrow ; for before her stood her empty dressing-case, and around her lay all her treasures, which she had evidently just taken from it. All the things she most prized were there—a strange medley, but which none who knew Lisa would have been surprised to see collected together. There were letters, and these she had been sorting and tying together ; there were relics of childish days—a broken silver bodkin-case, some coloured

beads, and a little ivory box, yellow with age ; and there was a sprig, too, of faded heather, gathered in one of her long rides with Percy, when she had been staying at Copelands the year before ; and some sketches she had made with him at the same time. Her mother's locket, also, and all her own ornaments were there—some of them wedding presents, but the greater number her husband's gifts. She had spread them all before her, and from the care with which they were arranged it was evident she had had a purpose in so doing. But strength or courage had failed her before her task was completed. She had broken down when looking at the coral ornaments Percy had given her when they were abroad, and which Isabel well remembered her having shown with so much glee to herself and Elinor, on their first visit to the cottage. Her fingers were fast clasped round one of the bracelets, and although her face was scarcely seen, her agony of grief was so plainly visible that Isabel shrank from witnessing it, and would have turned to leave her to herself again, but the power to move seemed gone. She felt as if rooted to the spot, and stood with her eyes riveted on that slight drooping figure—on those thin fingers, and the wasted outline of that half-hidden face, so changed now from all its old girlish beauty.

But Lisa raised her head at length—her passion of grief was over—her fingers relaxed their convulsive grasp, and she sat up. And then, with a rush of overpowering feelings, Isabel fully realised the truth of all that her worst forebodings could have predicted for her cousin. The unnaturally transparent complexion and brilliant eye—the hollow cheek with the bright hectic flush on it, and the parched and burning lips, told a tale too plain to be mistaken. A glass of water stood on the table beside her, and she took and drank it eagerly, and then turned as if to look for more. As she did so, her eye fell upon Isabel, and she started ; but more from surprise, apparently, at finding she was not alone, as she had thought, than from any other cause. She seemed to have forgotten how long it was since they had met—how little cause she had to hope for any pleasure in seeing her cousin. She held out her glass wistfully.

‘ Will you get me some more ? ’ she said. ‘ There is none here ; and I am so thirsty.’

She sank back, and eagerly, hurriedly, Isabel came forward and took the glass from her hand. To be able to do anything for the dying girl whom then she would have gone hundreds of



miles to serve, was more, she thought, than she deserved, and quickly she went away upon her errand, and then returned to sit down by her cousin's side while she once more drank off with feverish avidity the refreshing draught.

'Thank you—I am so thirsty,' she repeated, 'so tired this morning. I couldn't sleep last night, and we are going away this afternoon. I was trying—Ah, I had forgotten;' and she glanced at the things upon the table, and then at her cousin, and her look grew uneasy. 'You don't know—you have been away. Besides,' in a lower tone, and the words added another pang to Isabel's self-reproaches, 'it is nothing to you.'

'Nothing to me, Lisa!'

'No, nothing to you. Why should it be? You never cared for me, and it will be nothing to you when I am gone—gone for ever,' and she shuddered. And then altering her tone, 'I am very ill, Isabel,' she added; 'very ill indeed. But I have asked Percy to take me up on the hill for a little time, and surely, when I am once there, I shall get better. Don't you think so? I want to live—oh, so much, so very much!' Her eyes were turned beseechingly, imploringly to Isabel's face; but only for a moment. A tide of recollections seemed to come back with that look, and she turned away and burst into tears.

'Yes, I had forgotten indeed,' she murmured. 'I must not talk to you. *You* can't feel for me, for I have only stood in your way. I took him from you. But you will have him back soon now. I shall not keep him much longer, and then you can forget me—forget I ever lived. And I—oh! my happiness is soon over, Isabel—you need not have grudged it me for so short a time. I am only seventeen, but I am dying—yes, dying,' she said piteously. 'I would give worlds, if I had them, to live a little longer. I don't want to die just yet. I have been very happy; and the grave is dark and cold. I am afraid to be there alone. I like the warmth and the sunlight, and the world is very beautiful to me; I don't want to leave it. But I know I must. Yes,' she added passionately, 'I know my life will soon be over—that in a very little while there will come a day when the sun will be as bright and the birds will sing as they are singing now, and the sea will come washing up here against the garden wall as it always does, and everything will be the same; but I shall not see and hear it all. And you will

all live and love and be happy, and no one will ever think of me. None will remember me—remember that I, too, was happy once!’

She stopped, for Isabel, who had been in vain struggling to speak and to stem that torrent of despairing grief, now suddenly burst into tears—the first tears Lisa ever remembered to have seen her shed.

‘You are not crying for me, Isabel, are you? Oh, no; for I am nothing to you—I never was. All those years I lived at the Priory you never cared for me; and when I was lonely and sad because I had no home of my own, you wouldn’t let me be your sister. I hoped when you knew Percy cared for me and thought me good enough to be his wife, you would love me too. But you did not—you thought I had no right to take him from you. And now I must leave him. But—O Percy, is it really true?—must I really go? Mayn’t I stay a little longer?’ Here grief and excitement overcame her, and her strength failing suddenly, her head drooped upon the cushion on which she was resting, and she fainted away.

She came to herself to find Lane standing over her with cold water and hartshorn, and Isabel kneeling by her side holding one of her hands in hers. Too weak and confused to remember what had happened, she closed her eyes again with a weary sigh; but when consciousness returned more fully, her first movement was to draw away her hand and turn from her cousin with a look in which shrinking and reproach were mingled.

‘Leave me, please,’ she said faintly. ‘I am so ill; I can’t talk now.’

‘Won’t you let me stay?’ Isabel said pleadingly. ‘I won’t talk if you don’t wish it; but let me stay and sit with you.’

‘No;’ there was a shiver—almost a shudder as she spoke. ‘Oh, do leave me. I want to be alone.’

Isabel rose. How could she wonder her cousin shrank from her? It was only, she thought, part of her punishment for former neglect and unkindness. But it was hard to leave her then—to go without having been able to express one word of sorrow, or ask for forgiveness of that past which she would have given so much to recal. Slowly and sadly she went away, and there was a sigh of relief from Lisa as the door closed upon her.

‘Don’t let her come again, Mary,’ she said afterwards.

'You don't know how it makes me feel to see her. For she never cared for me. And she is strong and well; she cannot guess what it is to be as I am—to know that a little time ago I was like her—so well, so happy; and now to wake up every morning with the thought that I have only a few days more left to live. My happy home, and Percy, and my baby—I must leave them all!' And she hung over the child upon her knee in an agony of grief which no efforts of Mary's could calm.

They took her up to the hill, and there at first she seemed to be better; but it was only for a day or two, and before a week was over she was pining to be back in her own home. She missed the hundred little things in which she had always taken so much delight—the garden, the shade of the acacia-trees, and the sound of the waves upon the shore; and after all, she thought there was very little more air upon the high ground than lower down.

'I don't care, too, for these hills,' she said. 'They are not like ours at Atherstone, Percy. You remember them, don't you? You remember where we used to ride last year, in those happy, happy days? Do you recollect the purple heather on the moors, and the old grey rocks, and the little streams running through the valleys? How bright the sunlight was then! how it used to quiver and gleam so hot all over the country! and how pleasant and green the woods looked! We have nothing of that sort here. It is very beautiful, I know—the cliffs are very grand, and the sea is lovely; but I like it better from our own house, and we have more shade there. I am tired of this place. Take me home, please.'

So they took her home—to the home she was never more to leave; and then with her return came an end to all the restless longings and strivings for life—to that intense desire to 'live a little longer' which had preyed upon her so unceasingly. She had been like a bird in a snare struggling wildly against its fate; but better and calmer thoughts came now. Despair was gone, and she grew patient and quiet. Her own will was given up to a Higher; and as she learned to yield it more fully, hope and comfort dawned upon her.

'I am come back here to die, Mary,' she said. 'I know it quite well, but I can think of it now. I can bear to go. It's not so hard as it used to be to think of leaving you all; and when the time comes, perhaps it won't be hard at all. And you

will talk to me, won't you, Mary dear? Talk to me, please, as you did when I was a little child—when you used to tell me what was right, and wanted me to do it. I am not frightened then; and when I lie awake at night, or am alone in the day, I think of what you have said, and I don't feel afraid as I used. And I'll tell Percy now. I couldn't before, while I was always hoping and longing to live. But now I will—I'll tell him everything. And, Mary dear, I should like to see Isabel again. I don't think I was kind to her when she was here; and I am sorry for it. I wish I could see her and say good-bye to her. Do you think she will come?'

'I am sure she will, dear. She came up every day while we were on the East Hill to ask after you; and she was here again this morning, and wished very much to see you, only she didn't like to ask, as you said you didn't wish it. But you may not have another opportunity, for she is going home to-morrow'—

'Going home! Back to Atherstone?' Lisa's face flushed. 'O Mary!' and there was a long-drawn sigh and a look of unutterable sadness on her face. 'What wouldn't I give if I were going with her? I used to think so much about it when Percy first talked of taking me there. I thought it would be such pleasure to go back and see every one again—such pleasure to take baby with me and show her to them all. And now to think I shall never go!' She sat for some minutes silent; her varying colour and the tears which filled her eyes, though she would not let them fall, telling of the struggle within—one of her last struggles to yield submission cheerfully to that Higher Will than her own. A hard-fought battle it was, like many another she had then to fight; but it was won at length, and she looked up quietly.

'Yes; it's all best for me as it is. I know that, and I'll try and feel it. And, Mary dear, will you write a little note to Isabel and ask her to come some time to-day and say good-bye to me?'

Mary's note went; and that afternoon Isabel came down to the cottage. She found Lisa alone in the drawing-room, on the sofa as usual. As the door opened, she turned round with a smile. Perhaps she was expecting Percy, for when she saw only her cousin, her face changed a little, and the colour came into her pale cheeks.

'O Isabel!' She looked very shy, and Isabel herself, for almost the first time in her life, felt the same. But Lisa held out her hand, and she came forward.

'Mary said you wished to see me,' she murmured in a tone of apology, as if she thought she had no right to be there. 'She asked me to come.'

'Yes;' and Lisa looked shyer than before; but she made an effort to shake off her constraint. 'It's very kind of you to come, Isabel,' she added gratefully. 'After what I said the other day I was afraid perhaps you wouldn't. And I wanted to see you to—to say good-bye;' her voice faltered a little. 'I sha'n't see you again; and I didn't know you were going home so soon.'

There was a silence, for Isabel was struggling for self-control; and Lisa, not understanding the expression of her face, hesitated for a moment.

'I am afraid I said some things to you the other morning that were not very kind,' she went on, after a pause. 'That was another reason why I wanted to see you—to tell you I am very sorry, and to ask you to forget them all. Do you think you can, Isabel, as I shall never see you again? I know I have done a great many things you didn't like; but if you could forgive me, it would make me very happy.'

'O Lisa!' Isabel's attempts at self-control were gone now, and she threw herself on her knees beside her cousin. 'It is I who have to be forgiven. I have been unkind and unjust to you—not only now, but ever since I first knew you.' And in a passion of grief, with many bitter tears, she poured forth a confession of all her long-cherished jealous feelings; and forgetful of pride and reserve, told of her remorse and late-awakened repentance in terms of the most bitter sorrow and self-upbraiding. 'Lisa,' she said, 'I never tried to care for you, or to see the best of you. I was always looking out for your faults, and wishing to find you in the wrong; and it was that made me so miserably suspicious and unjust this last time. I never even hoped it might be a mistake, because I didn't wish it to be one. If I had, I should have done things in a different way; and then, most probably, the truth would have come out much sooner than it did; or rather you would never have been suspected at all. For it was my doing,' she added vehemently—'it was all my doing. It was through me others suspected you—through me that Percy doubted you. Yes,' as she noticed Lisa's sudden

start and flush; 'he would have known nothing of it if it hadn't been for me. Did he never tell you that?'

'No, never.' Lisa's head was down, and her face averted now.

'I thought you knew it;' and the colour in Isabel's face faded away, and she grew very pale. 'Well, you know it now,' she added with an effort. 'And you can't forgive me—I see that—nor have I any right to expect you should. But at least I can tell you I am sorry for it—that I would give all I have to be able to undo it. I thought, I hoped once I could have shown you'—— she burst into tears.

And Lisa was touched at once. There had been a hard struggle within her when she heard that all the misery she had endured from being doubted by her husband had been owing to her cousin; and for a moment she had been sorely tempted to turn away with the words of forgiveness unspoken. But better feelings prevailed. In that land to which she was fast hastening there would be no remembrance of wrong done—no hard, bitter thoughts of others; and could she give way to them now? She raised her head; and as her cousin still knelt by her side, she stooped forward and threw her arms round her neck.

'Dear Isabel, never mind it now—never mind the past. It's all gone, and we will never think of it again. Don't cry so—don't be so sorry, please. It is better for me as it is. I shall be very happy; and you must forget all I ever did to make you think so badly of me, and only remember that at the last we loved each other very much. Will you kiss me, and let me feel we have forgiven each other everything!'

An hour afterwards and Isabel had left that room for ever; she had passed for the last time the threshold of the home of which her miserable jealousy had blighted the happiness. A few months before, she had first entered those doors, and had met her cousin there, gay, bright, and beautiful, with all the hopes and pleasures of life about her. Now those hopes and pleasures were over, and the once happy girl whom she had envied and wronged was passing away in her spring-tide to the silence and rest of the grave. She paused for long at the little garden gate before she could make up her mind to take her last look at a place round which so many painful associations had gathered; and then she went her way down the shady lane, thinking with bitter sorrow of all she had missed and lost since that bright

April day when she had first trodden that path. When, years afterwards, she next passed the cottage, it looked as pleasant and sunny as ever among its shrubs and flowers ; but strangers then were living there. Lisa's name was forgotten ; and Percy, in a foreign land, had long been left to mourn in loneliness his 'broken household chain'—his severed ties.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### AT REST.

HAPPILY for Lisa she was spared the pain of speaking to Percy while he was yet unprepared for what was coming. The oppressively hot weather that had now set in told very fast upon her failing strength ; and it was impossible for him any longer to shut his eyes to the fact that she was every day becoming weaker, and more unequal to exertion of any kind. She was still carried down-stairs, but it was only to lie exhausted on the sofa, unable to occupy herself in any way ; and a succession of long fainting fits, which she had one day, and from which it was found difficult to recover her, seemed fully to undeceive him. In spite of all his endeavours to conceal his alarm, Lisa was conscious that he then in some measure realised the true extent of her danger. But perhaps he still hoped to deceive her by speaking cheerfully.

'I don't believe Mapleston understands your case,' he said that same evening, when she was better again, and he was sitting by her side. 'I shall write to my father by this night's post, and ask if he can't spare a day or two again to get down and see you. Or if he can't come, I'll have some London advice. It is only the change you want ; and we will see if we can't take you to Atherstone at once. You would like that, dearest, wouldn't you ?' he added, trying to smile.

But there was no answer—only Lisa's eyes filled with tears ; and then Mary saw by her wistful look that she would like to be alone with him, and gathering up her work, she stole away. When the door closed upon her, Lisa turned to him as he sat watching her uneasily.

'Dear Percy, will you come a little nearer—yes, quite near, please ; for I want to tell you something. I want to tell you what I have known a long, long time ; and what I almost think you know too, only you don't wish to believe it. Ah, yes ; I see you do,' as his face changed. 'You know I shall never get well—that I shall never go to Atherstone again, or any other place. You know well enough that your little Lisa won't be with you very long ; and, Percy, I should like to talk to you about it, please. Will you let me, and not let us try to think any more what isn't true ?'

There was no reply. His face was turned away, and when Lisa, after a long silence, ventured to pull down the hand which shaded it, she was shocked and startled by its expression.

'O Percy! don't look like that—please don't. I can't bear to see you. Won't you look at me as you always do? Won't you try and not mind it so very much, that we may not be unhappy the little time we shall be together? It won't be long now that I shall be with you. Won't you make me happy while I am? There are things I have been waiting to say to you. Won't you let me talk to you, and tell you all I want?'

There was no answer again—only a long and passionate embrace, as if he would have held her fast, and defied any power in heaven or earth to separate them ; but the thought how utterly unable he was to protect her from that unseen silent foe, who was so surely though slowly stealing between them, seemed to come upon him. His hold loosened, and she felt his hot scalding tears fall upon her hand.

'It is my doing,' he murmured. 'If it had not been for me, you would have been well and happy now. O Lisa! what have I done?'

Lisa looked at him sadly, and with something half of reproach in her large eyes. 'I thought—I hoped you had forgotten all that, Percy. It was not your fault ; I have never thought so. I wish you would promise me, when I am gone never to blame yourself for anything that happened then. Won't you promise me so ? It will make me so happy if you will.'



‘I can’t, Lisa,’ he said in a stifled voice. ‘I can’t make such a promise as that, for I couldn’t keep it. No, my darling’—seeing her disappointed look—‘I can’t promise that, even for you; but I will remember you never blamed me for it, and that you forgave me all my harshness and unkindness. Won’t that satisfy you, dearest?’

She smiled a little. ‘It isn’t quite true, Percy, because I never felt I had anything to forgive. But you shall think it if you like—if it will make you happier. And now we have settled that, may we forget it quite? Let us think only of pleasant things, and let us be as happy as we can while we are together. It is much harder to bear when I see you miserable. I feel then as if I couldn’t go; though I know so well I must. Won’t you help to make it easier for me, and not let our last days together be sad ones?’

Poor Percy! The words fell on his ear as if they had been her death-knell. He had *known* before that he was losing her—he *felt* it now; and the anguish of that moment, when he first realised that his idolised young wife was dying, was bitter beyond all that words could tell. The thought of so soon seeing the last of one whom he worshipped with such adoring love—of shutting away for ever in the darkness and silence of the grave the grace and beauty of which he was so proud—of having no more of the fond deep affection, and many loving words and ways which had been the charm of his life,—all came upon him; and with it such a dreary aching sense of desolation, as imagination pictured the long years of loneliness before him, that for a moment, overcome by the strong agony of his grief, he sobbed aloud. But Lisa’s look of piteous distress stopped him.

‘Don’t, Percy, don’t!’ she exclaimed, in such imploring accents that he was calm at once. ‘You don’t know how hard it makes it,’ she murmured, as he drew her closer to him. ‘I want so much to feel that it’s right and best I should go. Won’t you help me?’

Her voice of piteous entreaty was not to be resisted. He could not speak, but he caught the hand she was raising to wipe away his tears, and covered it with kisses. Perhaps she understood the silent compact which that action seemed to seal, for her look of distress passed away; and as he still held it in his, she smiled again a little.

‘Thank you, I knew you would. We will talk together, and

we'll learn to bear it patiently and give each other up. And we won't be unhappy for the very little time I shall have here now; will we?'

Percy's long-drawn, heart-wrung sigh was hardly an answer, and it told a bitter tale of anguish and self-reproach; but the power of perfect unselfish love is strong, and she never again saw or heard from him any expressions of the grief she had so much dreaded to witness. For her sake he controlled his sorrow, and, whatever he endured in secret, in her presence was always calm and even cheerful; till Mary, who better than any one knew the full strength of his fiery impulsive nature, marvelled at the amount of self-restraint which he exercised. Hard as he found it to preserve this self-control, it must have been a comfort to him afterwards to know that, by doing so, he had spared Lisa much pain, and made the short remainder of her stay as happy as he could. Those last few days (and they were very few) were, as she had hoped, not altogether sad—there was much to soften their bitterness. The worst, indeed, to her seemed over when there was no longer need for concealment from him. When she could talk to him—when she could tell him what she thought and wished and hoped—the last remains of her restlessness and all wild yearnings for life passed away for ever. She was not like the same Lisa then, who before, with all her loving ways, had had so much of impatience, caprice, and petulance about her. She was very patient now, very gentle, and very grateful for every little thing that was done for her; her chief thought seeming to be to save those about her as much trouble as possible. Her merry, child-like laugh was gone now, never to be heard again; but her smile was still there, and if not so bright as it had once been, there was even more sweetness in it; and never more so than when she welcomed Percy's return home each day. How he prized those smiles, it would be hard to say—all the more because he knew there would soon be nothing but the memory of them left, and felt how dreary his home would be without them in the days to come.

For the London physician who, much against her wish, was summoned to see her, only confirmed Dr Mapleston's opinion; and although he thought change of air might perhaps for a short time be beneficial, seemed to doubt the possibility of her being able to undertake the journey to Atherstone; nor did he give hopes of any permanent good being effected, even if she should

get so far. Some nearer place would be better, he said, if she really wished to leave home: but the wish to go now was not hers—it was Percy's; and he only clung to the idea because, with the thought of change, something like hope appeared to linger. But Lisa begged so hard to stay where she was that the plan was given up.

'I am so much happier here,' she said. 'And I know that going can't do me any real good. I might be better for a day or two, perhaps, but it wouldn't last. I should like to have gone to Atherstone if I could; for I have been longing—oh! so much, to see it again and everybody there. But perhaps it's better I shouldn't; for I think if I were to see all the old places where I was a child a little time ago, and used to play and be happy, it would make me wish to live. And I don't want to wish that again,' with a long sigh. 'I have been happier lately, to think of going. Let me die in our own home, Percy, where you have made me so happy. I should like to be here till the last.'

'You don't want me just at present, dear Lisa, do you?' Mary asked, coming into the room one evening a few days later. 'You seem so much better to-night, that I thought I would go to church as I didn't get there this morning. Not if you don't wish it,' she added, seeing Lisa's eyes fixed upon her earnestly; 'I can stay if you want me.'

'No, oh no. Percy will be with me, you know; and Lane is here to take baby when I am tired. Give me a kiss, though, Mary, before you go,' she said, still looking at her cousin in the same earnest way.

Mary smiled a little; but she stooped down and did as she was asked; and then with some last injunctions left the room.

It was Sunday: the bells far and near had been ringing for evening service; and even when they ceased the air was not still, for the break of the waters on the beach and the fresh wind sweeping through the garden trees kept up a pleasant stir and life around. All day long that cool breeze had been blowing, and under its influence Lisa had seemed stronger and better than for some weeks past; so much so, that when Dr Mapleston had paid his accustomed visit that morning, he had expressed his surprise at the improvement, and told her smilingly as he went away that she would soon be ready for her journey to Atherstone.

Could it be that something of hope still lingered in Percy's breast? Whatever the reason was, he certainly seemed lighter-hearted than for many a long day past. It was with almost a look of pleasure that he sat and watched her as she lay playing with her child; smiling and talking to it, and appearing quite delighted when she could win back a smile and a low murmuring sound in return. There was no sadness about her then: she seemed to have forgotten how very short-lived her pleasure must be; how soon she must be parted from the little creature over whom she was bending in such happiness. But when the child, tired out with play, dropped asleep upon her knee, with a smile still upon its face and its fingers fast wound in one of the long tresses of her hair which had fallen down, there was a silence, until Percy was startled by hearing a low sob. He rose hastily.

'What is it, dearest?' he said, coming to her side. 'You are tired, are you not? Let me ring for Lane to take her away.'

Lisa shook her head. 'No, it's not that,' and she tried to check her tears; but they only seemed to fall the faster for the effort she made to restrain them.

'What is it, then? Won't you tell me, dearest?' he said anxiously. 'You are not feeling worse, are you?' and he knelt by her side, his voice faltering as he spoke. Her smile, however, re-assured him; though it was through her tears that she looked at him.

'No. I am a great deal better to-day; better than I have been for ever so long. I was only thinking.' And once more tears choked her utterance. 'You must let me cry a little,' she said, as soon as she could speak again. 'Don't stop me; it does me good, for—I was thinking of baby.' There was another long pause. 'O Percy, she will never know me!' she exclaimed at last. 'She will never know how much I loved her. It makes me so sorry to think of it; and to think, too, that I shall know nothing of her—that I shall never have the pleasure of seeing her learn to walk and talk and run about, as I had hoped. It is very hard to give her up, and all the happiness I thought I should have with her. I fancied lately I had learned to do it, and that when the time came I should be able to go without feeling very sorry; but just now'——

She stopped, for the large tears had gathered in her eyes again; and one of them rolled slowly down and fell on the face of

the unconscious child. She wiped it away, and her gaze was fastened long and earnestly upon the little sleeper ; but Percy neither moved nor spoke. For many minutes her head was bent in silence, but the painful look of doubt and sorrow which had come over her face passed away, and in its place there came back the calmer, happier look, which lately had seemed to belong to it.

‘Yes, I was wrong ; I had forgotten,’ and she raised her head and checked a sigh which was coming. ‘Mary told me all about it one day ; and I know she was right. She said God had been very good to send baby to me to make me so happy, even for a little time ; and I know He has, and I must not feel it hard that He should call me now to go away and leave her. And I am sure when I see her again by-and-by, and when I see you too, Percy, I sha’n’t be sorry we were not together just for a few years. We shall none of us be sorry then, shall we ? We shall forget this time altogether.’ Her eye grew very bright.

He kissed her, but he did not speak. Ah ! hope that for a time they might yet not be parted, had not wholly died within him ; and it brought a bitter pang to hear her speak as if that separation might be near.

‘I am glad I shall leave her with you, Percy,’ she went on after a time. ‘You will want some one to comfort you ; and she will be a great pet—you will be very fond of her. I wonder whether she will grow up at all like me, and ever remind you of me. You will talk to her about me sometimes, won’t you ? Tell her how I loved her, and how grieved I was when I had to leave her—grieved at least at first,’ she added, correcting herself. ‘But not now—no, not now,’ in a low voice. ‘I know now that it is all right as it is.’ And once more she bent down again and kissed her child many times.

‘My little darling !’ she murmured. ‘You will think of me sometimes, won’t you ? and you will know how much I loved you. And, Percy, you won’t forget me either, will you ? But I know you won’t ; you will often think of me : and they must not be sorrowful thoughts. I may not be so far away after all—perhaps I may be very near. You can think I am ; and wherever you go you can fancy I am with you. And when you sit alone in the long winter evenings, as we used to sit last year, and the room is very quiet, you must not fancy you are quite alone. You must not feel sad then, Percy. Never feel sad, please, when

you think of me. You must only remember how happy you made me while I was with you.'

'Happy! My poor Lisa!'

'Yes, happy—very happy! I have often wished, Percy, to thank you for being so kind to me. You have no idea how different my life has been since I knew you. I was happy before—happy in a way, because Mary was so kind to me; but when you came everything changed. It made all the difference in the world to me knowing you. And when we were married, how happy you made me when everything was strange and new! and how very happy you have made me ever since!' She laid her head on his shoulder as he still knelt by her side. 'I feel as if I hadn't loved you half enough, and could never thank you as I ought. I only wish I could have lived a little longer to do a great deal more for you. I have thought of a great many things lately that I might have done to make your home happier. But you must think, please, that I tried to do my best, and that I wasn't very old, and should have done better by-and-by. For I did try to please you, Percy—indeed I did.'

'I know it, my darling—I always knew it. And you did it too. No one could have made a home happier than you always made mine, my little summer-bird.'

He stopped, overcome suddenly by the host of recollections brought back by that old pet word.

'Ah, yes, your summer-bird!' and Lisa's smile for a moment was very sad. 'Ah, Percy! you should have chosen some one else—some one who would have stayed with you in dark days as well as bright. The summer-birds go when autumn comes; and I am going too. I wish I could have stayed a little longer; only a very little, till the leaves begin to change. I want to see them falling again, as I saw them last autumn—as they did the day we were married. Do you remember how they came down upon us as we walked from church; and how warm and bright the sun was, and how the birds sang? It seems a very little time ago: I never thought then I shouldn't see the leaves fall again; and every morning lately I have looked at the trees opposite to see if they were fading. I want so much to see one yellow leaf before I die. But there is not one; and now I am afraid there never will be for me.'

'Lisa, my darling, don't say that. You are better now—you will stay with me a long, long time yet.' And again he drew

her closer to him—the hard stern lines of his mouth giving way, and quivering with suppressed anguish. But she did not see the alteration in his face. Her eyes were fixed on the waving boughs of the acacias, where the sun's last rays were playing ; and she looked at them long and earnestly. There was no trace of change among their leaves.

‘How beautiful they are with that red light upon them!’ she said, in a low thoughtful tone. ‘And how beautiful the sea looks beyond, with that line of gold and crimson across it! Do you know, when I see everything so lovely, when I look at those beautiful waters and the sunset above them, I wonder what that other world must be like where everything is to be so much better—so much more lovely. This seems almost perfect—as if one could hardly wish for more beauty anywhere. And yet there will be, of course ; because we are told so. I wish you would read me those last two chapters in the Bible, Percy, where it speaks of our other home. I should like to hear them while I lie here and look at the sunset.’

Percy did as he was asked. He took up Lisa's little Bible that lay beside her, and though his voice faltered once or twice as he read of the golden city, with its blessed inhabitants, from whom death and sorrow and pain have passed away, yet he went on to the end, and Lisa made no remark when he had finished. She only raised herself a little ; and then he asked if she wanted anything.

‘No, nothing more, thank you. I like to think of that ;’ and there was a long silence. She lay with her eyes closed, and after some time her low regular breathing seemed to tell that she was asleep. It must have been a sound sleep too ; for when her baby stirred once or twice, she did not notice it ; and generally the slightest movement on its part was sufficient to rouse her from her slumbers.

‘Poor child, how tired she is!’ thought Percy ; but he remembered the many weary days and restless nights she had had for so long, and felt only too glad she should have the sleep she so much needed. He knelt on, and watched the sun go down, and the last faint streaks of crimson light fade, and the western sky grow dark. And then the stars came out above, and glimmered brightly on the far-spreading waste of waters. And one there was brighter and clearer than all the rest, which shone with a calm and steady ray ; and as he looked at it, and contrasted its

unwavering light with the restless motion of the troubled waves below, he could have fancied it an emblem of that bright and changeless world on whose portals it seemed to stand, and of whose glories he had just been reading.

He watched it for very long, until it too went down like the sun behind the high cliffs on the beach ; and it was only when its light was gone that he recollected where he was, and began to feel something of the constraint of his position. But his arm was round Lisa, and her head was still resting on his shoulder ; and he would not disturb her, though he wondered she slept so long. Once only she had moved a little ; and he had fancied then he heard something like a sigh, as if she had been waking ; but she had not spoken, and there had been no other sound since. She was very quiet now ; and the child was sleeping too, as peacefully as its mother, so he did not stir. He knelt on undisturbed in the dark and silent room, till Mary's step was heard in the hall, and her voice close to the door. Even then he would not move ; and as she came in with a light in her hand, he motioned to her to tread softly, and not to speak. She set down the candle she was carrying, and with a cautious step came across the room ; stopping for a moment at the foot of the sofa, while unfastening her bonnet strings, and then pausing to look a little longer at the two sleepers there, the child who was slumbering so quietly, and Lisa, who lay with her arm fast clasped round it, and her face half hidden on her husband's shoulder. Something in that face, however, shaded as it was, arrested Mary's attention ; and the perfect stillness of that sleeping form filled her all at once, she knew not why, with a strange fear. She would have spoken, but could not ; and for some moments she stood, afraid to move, lest that great dread which was beginning to find shape should resolve itself into certainty. Unable, however, at last to bear the oppressive silence, she crept round to her cousin's side, and bending over her, laid her hand upon hers as it rested on her child. And then she knew all. The cold touch, the drooping head, and that lifeless stillness told everything. Lisa was gone—gone to her rest in sleep—gone without suffering of any kind. Death, which she once had feared so much, had come to her gently and kindly ; she had mercifully been spared the parting to which she had so long looked forward with dread. With her child upon her arm, and by the side of him whom she loved best, she had passed away ; and there was no trace now of pain or sorrow on her fair



young face—only a strange, unearthly beauty—a light as it seemed from the other world.

‘Percy,’ it was long before Mary found voice to speak. ‘Dear Percy, you must lay her down—you can’t disturb her now.’ And then, as she herself stooped to take up the sleeping child from its dead mother’s arms, all the floodgates of her sorrow gave way, and she burst into tears.

With a startled look Percy raised his head and gazed at her, as if utterly unable to comprehend her meaning. But as he appeared to realise the sense of her words, his face changed, and like her, he bent down to look and listen. For many minutes there was silence in the room—silence so still and deep that Mary could hear the beating of her own heart; and then there came a cry—a low terrible cry of bitter agony which seemed wrung from a broken heart.

‘Lisa, my Lisa, my little Lisa, come back to me!’

But he spoke in vain. The voice for which he listened was hushed—the shadow of death was on his home.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### A LONG PARTING.

MORNING came—another glorious summer morning, all light and beauty. The sunshine sparkled on the sea, and the little waves came dancing in and broke merrily upon the sandy shore. Among the trees about the cottage the breezes were playing joyously; and many thousands awoke that day to new hopes and gladness. There was no change in the world because one young life was over. In all that busy town there were few to give a thought to the darkened room where a still and shrouded form was lying—few to think of the sorrow and desolation that had

come on the home from which one so cherished was gone. Lisa herself had once shrunk from the thought of being so little missed in the world of life about her—of resting unconscious of the glory and beauty of all outer things. But what were they to her now? The warmth and brightness of the summer and the snows and storms of winter would be alike unheeded; and even the wailing of her child had no power to disturb her sleep. Calmly she lay there now; and as Mary stood by her side and contrasted that still deep repose with the restlessness of the days just past, and saw the happy look upon the face which lately had so often been clouded by grief and pain, she felt that the change for her was indeed a blessed one.

But it was hardly in those first days that Mary felt her loss the most. It was for others she had lived all her life; and it was of others she had now to think. For Percy was stunned by the blow which had come upon him; and in the endeavour to spare him as much as possible she had but little time to think of her own grief. And well it was for him that he had her to turn to—that he was not alone in his sorrow. It was something to him to know there was one to share it with him—something to know that the treasure which had been idolised by him had been prized by another too; that the same thoughts of her were in the minds of both, though her name was never mentioned. For he could not bring himself to talk of her. Not even to his sister could he speak of ‘his little Lisa,’ ‘his summer-bird,’ as he had so fondly called her. From the time when he had laid her down, when there had been no answer to his passionate entreaty to her to listen to him—from that time her name became to him a thing of the past, sealed and sacred. He never mentioned it himself, and could not hear it from others; and once when Mary, hoping to rouse him from the silent grief which seemed to be crushing him, spoke of her cousin—spoke of her by name, as Lisa—the look upon his face, and the sudden contraction of his brow, told her it was more than he could bear; even without his hurried exclamation, ‘Not now, Mary—not yet. I must hear it from others by-and-by, but not from you! Let me forget now if I can.’

Forget! Yes, if silence had been forgetfulness, he might have forgotten. For silently, and with no outward signs of grief, he stood each day by Lisa’s coffin. In silence he looked at the much-loved and lifeless form that lay there ready for its last

unbroken rest—the young face which once had been so bright and joyous, now so still and quiet—the golden hair, his pride and admiration, now braided away, and the long eyelashes closed for ever over those dark loving eyes. In silence he took his last look at her on the day that the coffin-lid was fastened down to shut her from his sight; and in silence he followed her to the churchyard beside the sea where she was to lie—a crowded burial-ground where the rich and poor of many generations slept together, and where one more grave in a quiet corner would pass unnoticed. Who would know that under that low mound was buried away so much of grace and loveliness, so much of the joy and happiness of a life that had been bound up in her who was sleeping there? and who that ever chanced in days to come to pause by that lowly grave, would turn from it to think of the husband sitting by his lonely hearth, dreaming of the bright-haired, beautiful girl who once had sat with him there, and rousing himself with a start to find that he was alone with his memories of the past?

He went back now to his home, through a summer shower that was falling—stealing softly and silently down, as it might have been in calm and chastened weeping for the early dead. And well would it have been for him if he too could have wept; and then have lifted his eyes to the distant hills beyond the bay, on which, even through the rain, the sun's bright rays were once more kindling, speaking of hope and light beyond the clouds. But neither tears nor hopes were his—only a dreary blank, a sense of utter and forlorn nothingness.

And so he went back to his home—back to Lisa's room; and locking the door behind him, sat down upon the sofa and looked around him—looked at the far-spreading sea, now dancing again in sunshine—at the yellow sands, and the garden trees where the raindrops were glistening; and then his eye came back to that desolate room, so strange, and yet so familiar. For all about him were her things. Her books, her work, her writing-case, the last dress she had worn, the little ornaments—his ornaments—which she had had on when she died; amongst others the pearl ring, his betrothal gift to her scarcely a year before. He took it up now. What a child she had been when he had put it on her finger; and back came at once, in a flood, all the recollections of that day—that sunny day at Copelands. The white gate by which they had stood, the wych-elm by the road-

side, the green lane down which he had walked, and looked back to see her watching him as he went—he saw them all. And what memories of all that time were stirred up then! Of his coming up that lane every morning to find her waiting for him, of her face of delight when she caught sight of him; of their long walks and rides, their talks together; of her frank, child-like happiness, so curiously mixed with her half-shy, but graceful, loving ways. How proud then had been his love and admiration for her! How proud had he been too in later days, when for a little time he had called that graceful fairy-child his wife! That time was over now, those few months of happiness were past, and she was gone. Gone! No, he could not realise it—when all around him spoke of her, he could not believe she was really gone—and for ever. It was only for a little while—for a few hours. She had gone out somewhere, but she would come back—and he thought he heard her gay voice singing in the garden, as she had often sung among her flowers, and then her light footstep on the stairs. She was coming that way—coming to look for him! Ah, why did she pause at the door? why did she come no farther? And why at that moment was there a child's cry—her child's—to break the stillness of the house, and bring him back from the world of fancy to the sad realities of life?

He rose then, and going to a table near, opened her writing-case and took from it a paper which she had told him he would find there. It was the same that Isabel had one day seen lying beside her. He took it up and read it through—all her wishes with regard to the many little things she called her own. He read them through from beginning to end, and never flinched. There was no change in his face, except once; and that was when he came to Isabel's name amongst those of others, to whom some of her most prized treasures had been left. There was a look then—a look of the most bitter, most intense anguish; and a sudden movement of his hand, as if he would have dashed out that name. But the look went again, and his hand fell, and he read on to the end as unmoved as before.

And then he laid the paper down, and stood for a few minutes with his arms folded as if in thought. But not for very long, he roused himself again, and took out all her letters—letters that she had received mostly from Atherstone, and the greater number from Mary; but there were a few of his own, too; written when he had been at Hoole. She had asked that they might all

be burnt; and he threw them all together on the hearth, and setting light to them, watched until they were consumed. And then he took her empty writing-case, and put it away in a drawer with her work-box and favourite books; and collecting every little thing that had been left about, he put them all away, until the room looked very bare and desolate. He stood in the middle of it then, gazing round with a face well-nigh heart-broken in its expression; and then taking up her dressing-case and the paper he had been reading, he went away, locking the door and carrying off the key. He took the dressing-case to Mary, who was sitting sad and lonely in the drawing-room with the baby, and laying down the paper beside her, said in a steady though not very natural voice:

‘Will you see that all that is done—the first part I mean? The rest I shall see to myself.’

Mary took the paper. She could not look so unmoved as he had done on poor Lisa’s last expressed wishes, and her tears fell very fast while reading them; but he did not notice her. He took up his child from her knee, and walking away to one of the windows, stood there with it asleep in his arms for the rest of the afternoon, neither moving nor speaking. And all the evening afterwards he sat silent and motionless; not thinking, only feeling—feeling that dreary blank, that utter hopelessness of despair.

And so time went by—time which the year before at that same season had gone so fast. Days began and ended, and passed into weeks; but each as it went seemed to bring little change to Percy. He set out every morning to his duties, and came back every afternoon at his usual time; but his employments had become nothing but an irksome round, which, though they gave him occupation, never brought forgetfulness. His first look always on entering the room after any absence, was towards the place where Lisa, whenever she was down-stairs, had been either sitting or lying; and the sight of his face, and the heavy sigh with which when he missed her there he would turn away, gave Mary many a heart-ache. His evenings were spent in silence, mostly with a book in his hand, which however he very seldom appeared to read; while Mary sat near him with her own book or work; and although she made many attempts to rouse him into cheerfulness, his weary ‘Leave me alone, Mary; let me be quiet with you,’ was far from encouraging; and she found it better in general to desist.

‘Dear Percy, how I wish I could help you,’ she said, coming to his side one evening, when he had been standing for long in the twilight without speaking. ‘Is there nothing I can do for you?’

‘No, nothing, thank you. You can’t bring her back, and that is all I want.’

And Mary turned away in silence; that hopeless tone told her how useless it was for the present to try and reach his sorrow. To time alone could she look to soften his grief—to time and to one other comforter still left him—his little child. For in her he seemed to find his only pleasure; and when she was with him, when walking about with her in his arms, as he often did by the hour together, his face would lose much of its sadness; and as she grew day by day in beauty and intelligence, Mary noticed with intense pleasure how much she drew him from his melancholy musings, re-awakened his interest in passing things, and gave him new subject for thought and hope. She was still a delicate, tiny creature, but very quick and lively; with her mother’s large dark eyes, and much of her mother’s look and loveliness about her when she smiled. To watch for that smile—to try to win it from her—was Percy’s chief delight; and it was one which became no rare thing. For she grew to know him, and soon learned to show a decided preference for him. His dress at first had much to do with this. His scarlet waistcoat and the gold band of his cap caught and pleased her eye, from their contrast to the sombre hue in which every one else about her appeared; and she never saw them without evident tokens of delight, and signifying in restless baby ways her wish to go to him. And nothing gave him more pleasure than did the first signs of that preference. From that hour something of his loneliness and sadness seemed to vanish; and when he found that she turned to him—that she preferred his arm to that of every one else—and cried when he was obliged to leave her, he felt, though he hardly acknowledged it to himself, that the interests and pleasures of life were not quite gone; and that his child, if she were spared to him, might yet make up for much that he had lost.

But when first beginning to understand all that Lisa’s child might be to him, he was suddenly called on to part from her. For he was ordered to the Cape. He could not take his child with him, as once he had determined on doing; for both his father and Dr Mapleston agreed in pronouncing a more bracing

climate necessary for her. There was nothing for it therefore but to leave her in his sister's charge, and send her, as her mother had been sent, to Atherstone for a home.

It was not without a most bitter pang that this resolve was taken, and he made up his mind to part with the child, whose baby smiles and likeness to her young mother had so won his heart. He hardly let her leave his arms that evening; and when he went to look at her, as he always did, after she had been carried to his sister's room for the night, he stood there watching her for so long that Mary was afraid something was wrong, and asked what was the matter with her.

'Nothing,' was the answer: but he did not move, and after a long silence, he added, 'You must take good care of her, Mary; and if I don't come back, mind you make her happy, poor child!'

Mary stooped down to kiss the sleeping baby, and her voice faltered a little as she said, 'I think you can trust me, Percy. If I didn't love her already for her own sake, I should for her mother's. I promised *her* to take care of her.'

A few days of bustle and preparation followed—days during which Mary was too thankful she had no time to think, and that at night she was too tired to lie awake and muse over the present and the past. She could not afford to give way then; thought might come afterwards, but in the meanwhile she worked away incessantly. For the cottage was to be given up, and she and Lane were to return to Atherstone when her brother left. There was much, therefore, to be done; and in packing and superintending the removal of things that were to be sent before them to the Priory, she found unceasing occupation; which, in spite of the weariness it brought both to mind and body, she could not regret.

On the last evening of all, when everything was done, she found herself at liberty to go once more to that quiet grave in the churchyard by the sea. The evening was closing in, and she was very tired; but the distance was not great, and putting on her cloak and bonnet, she made her way by the sands to her cousin's resting-place. It was raw and cold; a grey mist was creeping over the sea, whose white waves curled and broke at her feet with a sullen murmur, and the wind swept by her with a harsh dreary sound that saddened her weary spirit as she struggled on against its buffeting. The churchyard

was quieter, but it looked dark and gloomy. And she started when, in the quiet corner where Lisa was laid, something moved near her, and she saw a dark form standing by that low grave. But it was only for a moment; for in the dim light she recognised her brother, and she drew close to him and stood in silence by his side. No one else was there—in that solitary place they seemed alone; and yet was it really so? In spirit might *she* not still be near them, watching with them in their loneliness and sadness? Mary believed it; and while the sky looked dark above, and only the wail of the wind, mingling with the deep hoarse sound of the ground-swell upon the beach, met her ear, in fancy the low rush of that wind seemed to her like angel-wings, and her thoughts went travelling on beyond the clouds and storms that hung around, to that brighter world—the home of that might-be angel-watcher. She could not weep then—tears for one so blessed would have seemed wrong; and that other world at that moment was too near for her to feel, as she often did, so very desolate. She did not think then of Lisa as she lay shrouded in darkness and silence under that grassy mound; but she thought of her in all her beauty, a bright and glorious being, in whose eyes lay no shadow of grief, and round whose young brow a halo of perfect happiness had gathered.

But she grew cold at last; the mist had changed to a drizzling rain, and the damp, penetrating her dress and cloak, roused her to a recollection of time and place. She laid her hand on her brother's arm.

‘It is getting late, Percy. Shall we go?’

He looked up then. ‘Go! yes, you had better, it’s cold here for you.’

‘And for you too. You will come with me, won’t you?’

He shivered, but made no answer, and for some moments still stood where he was. Then he stooped down over the grave, and gathered something from it; only a little of the grass that grew there, as she saw afterwards. There were no flowers; she had planted some round it in the summer, but they had drooped as autumn came on, and now they were faded and gone. He took that little bit of grass instead; and then he turned away, and they walked back in silence, through the misty rain, to their desolate home.

A long sad evening that last one was, in the half-furnished room which once had looked so gay and pretty. The pictures



were gone from the walls, the books from their cases, the ornaments from the mantelpiece and tables; they had all been sent to Atherstone. Lisa's piano had been sold; her flowers were gone, and so were her birds, with the exception of a solitary canary which Mary meant to take with her; that and Prince having been the two pets of which her cousin had thought most. The dog lay now on the hearth-rug before the fire, his bright eyes peering through his shaggy hair; but he seemed restless, and at times whined uneasily, as if he would have asked what change had come there, and where the young mistress was, whose step and voice were missing. And Mary stitched away at her work, and Percy sat in silence with his eyes fixed upon the fire. And without, the storm was howling, and the sea broke in long sullen roars upon the beach, while shrill blasts of wind whistled past the house, and went shrieking and moaning off among the distant hills.

A wet and stormy day succeeded that stormy night. The rain was dripping heavily from the half-leafless acacia trees and trailing creepers, when Mary took her last look out upon the garden, with its damp sodden grass, and fading, dying flowers. There was but little vestige left of its former beauty—the hands that once had tended it were still and at rest for ever, and everything they had cared for seemed passing to rest also—to the long sleep of winter. A longer sleep must be Lisa's, a far deeper repose than that of the flowers she had watched and cherished; but *her* spring would come too, and like them she would rise again to life and beauty. And happy for her, Mary thought, that in the meantime she was safe and at rest—at rest from sorrow, and safe from the trials and partings which must come to those who were still below. More than ever was this thought in her mind, as she pictured that long parting which lay before herself, and watched her brother's face when looking his last round the home in which the greater part of his short wedded life had been spent. She wished he would have given way then, that he had been alone, with nothing to oblige him to retain that composure which a reserved and haughty nature only enabled him to keep up. Anything, she felt, would have been better than that forced unnatural manner, that stony grief. Last orders were given, and last preparations made in a dry business-like way, which told nothing of his innermost feelings; and when the carriage came that was to take them to the station, no one but Mary noticed the look with

which he turned for the last time to that low-roofed cottage home where he had known both his greatest earthly happiness and his greatest trial.

A cold wet journey took them to Southampton, where they were joined by Dr Tennent, who had found time to meet them there, for the double purpose of seeing his son again, and taking his daughter and grandchild down to Atherstone. A short time spent together then, and a few hours more in the morning, and Mary had seen her last of Percy. So hurried was he when the time for leaving came, that a hasty farewell was all he was able to take of his child as she lay in her nurse's arms. She had been fretting all the morning, but just then she was lying very quiet, and as he came up she turned to him with one of her sweet baby smiles. No time then for the toss and the game for which she always looked—no time even to take her for a moment; and that smile of hers recalling the loved and lost nearly upset in that parting moment the strong man's resolution. His lip quivered as he bent down for a long last kiss.

'God bless you, my little darling, and keep you, if I never see you again,' he murmured. And then he turned away, and, without even another look at the child he was leaving for so long, hurried from the room.

His father and Mary went with him to the *Castle Cary*, which lay at some little distance down the river; but their parting might almost as well have taken place on shore, for little was said by any of them, and the few minutes during which they stood together on the wet and slippery deck, in the pouring rain, amidst all the confusion of last arrivals, and final leave-takings of friends, only made Mary feel more bitterly the pain of that parting. She had time, however, for a hurried visit to his berth to see what were his chances of comfort during the voyage; and time also to hang up there a basket of flowers which she had filled with wet earth and moss, in hopes that by this means their gay blossoms might almost last out to the Cape. And then the bell was ringing, the anchor was heaving, and the last boat was leaving for the shore. A few minutes more, and that long farewell had been taken; and she and her father in rain and sleet were making their way back over the stormy water, while the *Castle Cary* was slowly dropping down the river. As long as it was still in sight—as long as she could still distinguish the forms upon its crowded deck, Mary stood

up watching her brother leaning over the vessel's side ; but it passed away at last in the shrouding mist—her own tears and the driving sleet hid it from her sight ; and then she sat down by her father, and gave way unchecked to the grief she had so long kept back.

Drenched with rain and spray, they got back to their hotel ; but not to stay. Dr Tennent was anxious to get home again as soon as possible ; and they started for town that same afternoon. Rain, rain still as they went—all the country was veiled in mist, and the autumn day closed in again in storm. The *Castle Cary* went down the Channel that night in a furious gale ; and Mary in their London lodging lay awake and listened to the howling of the wind and the heavy fall of the rain in the streets, and envied the unconscious child who slept upon her arm, knowing nothing of the mother she had lost or of the father who had left her that day.

They travelled down to Atherstone on the following morning ; and on that bleak autumnal day, Mary once more re-entered the house which a few months before she had left on an early summer's morning, in obedience to that hasty summons of her brother's. Her welcome back was almost a silent one, except from the children, who danced about her, and were never tired of admiring poor Lisa's baby, pronouncing it the most beautiful little thing they had ever seen. But neither Isabel nor Elinor could look at the motherless child without the most painful feelings ; and Mrs Tennent was graver even than was her wont as she watched Mary bending over her young charge. Was she thinking of another child whose worse than motherless life she had so often embittered by her harshness ; and when she met the gaze of those large wondering baby eyes, did they awaken recollections of the warm-hearted, though impetuous girl, whose young days in that same home she had made so far from happy ? But if so, she was not the one to confess it ; and her only remark was that the child looked very delicate—she did not think Mary would be able to do much for it.

'Yes, I am afraid she has a hard task before her,' Dr Tennent said, looking fondly, though with some sadness, at his little grand-daughter. 'We must do what we can for her, poor child, but I am afraid Percy will not see her again. It is as well for him, perhaps, that he was obliged to part with her so soon, before he came to care for her too much.'

Mary was silent; but she stooped to kiss her charge, and as she did so there was a silent vow in her heart, that if love and care of hers could save her brother's child, that care should not be wanting—and the vow was renewed when in the twilight of that same day she sat by the fireside in her own room, and thought of the cousin from whom one short year before she had parted for what she had believed would be to her a long life of happiness. For that day was the sixteenth of October, and as she sat in the red glowing firelight, while the rain was dripping without, and gusts of wind were sweeping round the house and through the fading lime-trees, in thought she went back to that same day twelve months before, when the world had looked bright—when the birds had sung, and the sun had shone—when the bells from the old Priory church had rung out a merry wedding peal, and she had said ‘good-bye’ to her brother and his beautiful young bride; and then had sat where she was sitting now, to dream over their future. How little had she then guessed that the child she loved so well, and from whom it had cost her such a pang to part, would never more come back to her home—that when that day came round again, she would be at rest in her quiet grave, and he with whom she had gone so gladly, would be on his way alone, and half broken-hearted, to a distant land! And she looked at the little child they had left, and wondered whether she would be spared to gladden her father's heart, if he ever returned from that far-off shore; and whether she would be to herself, in days to come, what her mother had been before her.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

‘LONG YEARS HAVE COME, LONG YEARS HAVE GONE.’

MORE than five years passed away, and once again it was a spring day at Atherstone. The lime-trees at the Priory were fast coming into leaf, and the shade upon the green walk beneath them was deepening daily; while the borders that skirted the garden lawn were filled with the first flowers of the season, and the lawn itself looked fresh and green after the rain and snows of winter. The sky above was blue, and the old house, and all about it, wore its sunniest, gayest aspect. The years that had passed had brought little change to it. The long low rooms, with their dark heavy furniture, were the same as in other times—the brightly-polished hall and staircase still gave back the reflection of the sun’s rays which fell through the latticed windows. The vine and the rose-tree still hung over and darkened the casements, and not one nook or corner of the numberless little up-stair rooms was altered in any way. Were those who lived there unchanged too?

On that bright afternoon Isabel was sitting alone in her studio as she had been used to sit in the days that were gone. The sunlight, that made its way in through the budding vine-leaves, fell upon her easel, which still stood in its old position, and all around her were her drawings and paintings, her books and sculpture, her music and her engravings, as they had been gathered in former times. The room looked so much the same now as it had done then—that it might have been but the other day since Lisa had sought admittance there—since she had looked with a wondering, reverential gaze at the treasures of art collected in it, and turned away in anger and disappointment because its beauties and curiosities were not meant for her to see.

But Isabel was not the same—time, which had brought so little change to the things around her, had changed her. Her face had lost the freshness of youth; and though intellectual as ever, was marked with lines of thought and care, almost of

sadness, as if life had not brought all it had once seemed to promise. Her youth was going—she was looking back upon it, and what had it given her? Not happiness—for the pursuits in which she had spent it, refined and ennobling as they might be, had been worked for for themselves alone, not as an end to better things. As she went back in retrospect over the years that were gone, she saw they had been wasted, because they had been spent on herself alone. It was for herself she had lived; and now she knew it had all been in vain. She felt that the recollection of kindly words and deeds to others—of a youth given to making those around her happy, would have been worth more than the talents—the knowledge of which she had long been so proud. All her gifts, all her talents, she would have given now to have had the remembrance of a life of care and love for others, of a charity which had thought no evil, had believed the best of all, and cherished no unkind or envious feelings. There would then have been no self-reproach to mingle with her memories of by-gone days—no bitter regret for words and deeds now past recall—no vain yearnings for affection trifled with and lost. Poor Isabel! it was a dreary waste of years on which she was looking back; and it was not strange that though the world around her was so bright on that spring day her brow was clouded, and her face wore such a sad weary expression. She did not notice the beauty of outward things—she did not see the dancing of the sunlight, the young leaves waking into life, the world of insect being rejoicing in the warmth; she sat absorbed in her own painful thoughts—so absorbed in them that she was not aware she was no longer alone—that some one had stolen noiselessly into the room. A little child stood there—a tiny child with delicate features and the faint pink of some blush-rose upon her cheek—with large dark eyes and long curls of soft brown-golden hair. There was no mistaking those eyes and hair—they would have told whose child she was, even had the resemblance to her mother been less striking. Isabel’s face brightened as she saw her.

‘Come back already, little May?’ she said with a smile; and as the child ran forward eagerly and laid her head in her lap, she kissed her fondly. ‘Why, you didn’t stay very long to-day. What was Lane doing to bring you back so soon?’

‘I don’t know; she said she was going to be busy. But, oh, Aunt Isabel,’ and May lifted a joyous face, ‘I am to have a

chicken! Mrs Pye is going to give me one—a real chicken! I'm to go every day and see it. She gave me a cake too,' and May fumbled in a small pocket, and produced a cake in rather a dilapidated condition. 'Do you like plumcake, Aunt Isabel? It's very nice.'

'Thank you, my darling; but I won't take it all,' Isabel said, breaking off a small piece. Not for worlds would she have distressed her little niece by telling her the proffered dainty was by no means in so inviting a condition as it might have been. 'You must have some of it too,' she added. 'But suppose you leave it for tea. That will be better than eating it now.'

To which proposition May acceded; the more readily because, as she confessed, she was not hungry, having already had more ginger-bread at Mrs Pye's than she wanted. So the cake was put back into the small pocket, being this time wrapped in a piece of paper, of which she possessed herself for the purpose. The paper was a drawing of her aunt's, but no objection was made. She did what she liked in that room; and when she turned to amuse herself with Isabel's paint-brushes and palettes, and then, still talking very fast of what she had been doing at Copelands, proceeded to stick her fingers into the clay figure which her aunt had only just finished modelling, not a word of remonstrance was offered. But though well aware she had no cause to fear rebuke for anything she chose to do there, May discovered after a time that her dear Aunt Isabel looked graver than was her wont when they were alone together, and did not listen with her accustomed interest to what was said.

'Does your head ache, Aunt Isabel?' she asked at last in childish sympathy; stopping short in an endeavour to stick the head again upon the figure she had been mutilating.

Isabel looked up. 'No, dear, not at all. What makes you think so?'

'You look so sorry,' was the rejoinder. 'I thought,' pursued May after a pause, 'I thought you would have been glad now papa is coming home.'

Isabel was silent; but she winced visibly at the words.

'Don't you want him back?' May went on. 'Won't you be glad to see him again? I thought you would.'

'Yes, dear, so I shall,' Isabel spoke with an effort. 'May, my darling,' she added hastily, 'open the door for Prince; he wants to come in.'

May whisked off in a great hurry ; and Prince being admitted, a romp ensued for some minutes between dog and child, which occasioned no little confusion among Isabel's various scattered possessions. The game, though, did not serve to do more than divert the child's thoughts for the time, and she presently began again—

‘I wonder what papa is like, and whether he'll be kind to me. Do you think he will ; or will he be angry because I don't know anything? Aunt Nelly called me a little dunce this morning.’

And, truth to say, Aunt Nelly had not been far wrong in that assertion ; for a greater ignoramus at nearly six years old than Miss Lisa Mary Tennent it would have been hard to find. Letters were still a mystery to her, and a mystery not likely to be soon solved with her consent ; and in every other branch of learning she was equally deficient—a fact to be accounted for by her delicate health, which had long been a source of uneasiness to those who had the charge of her. But unwearied, watchful care, and plenty of fresh air and exercise, had brought her through the common ailments of childhood ; and though still fragile-looking, she was no longer the subject of anxiety she had once been.

‘Do you love papa, Aunt Isabel?’ she went on after a pause. ‘You never talk to me about him as Aunt Mary does. You don't care for him, do you?’

Isabel was silent for a moment, and then she said in a low voice, ‘Yes, dear, indeed I do. I care for him more than I can tell you.’ She spoke quietly, but something in her tone made May look up ; and she gazed at her wonderingly on seeing her eyes full of tears.

‘What have I said, Aunt Isabel? Why have I made you cry?’ she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her with childish impetuosity. ‘Oh, I'm sorry!’

‘My darling, there's nothing to be sorry for.’ But somehow that childish sympathy upset Isabel completely. She could not check her tears ; and May grew impetuous.

‘Then it's papa!’ she exclaimed indignantly. ‘I won't like him if he makes you cry. I'll never love him—never, never’——

‘Hush, May, dearest, hush! You mustn't talk like that, my darling. There is no one I want to see more than your papa—I'm tired of waiting for him, May—tired of waiting all these long years. And now’—— she paused.



‘And now you are glad!’ May said, doubtfully—‘glad that he’ll be here in six weeks!’

‘*Very* glad.’ There was a long-drawn sigh.

‘Then, Aunt Isabel, why did you cry? Why do you look so sorry?’

Isabel hesitated. ‘I can’t tell you, dearest; never mind,’ she said at last. ‘I was thinking of a great many things—things that happened long ago—but never mind them now,’ she added, forcing a smile. ‘We are only going to talk of pleasant things now. We must think how glad he will be to come back, and see his little May—it will make him very happy, dear, to have some one to love and care for him, when he has been so lonely all this time.’ And with an effort, which she had hitherto thought it impossible to make, she overcame the painful reserve that had always hung over her when her brother’s name was mentioned, and for the first time spoke of him voluntarily to his child—telling her of his kindness, his cleverness, and his bravery; till May began to think she knew him quite well, and was ready once more, as she always was when Mary talked to her in a similar way, to look upon his coming as a very pleasant thing.

A knock at the door, and a request that ‘Miss Isabel would go down, for there were visitors in the drawing-room,’ was an unwelcome interruption to both of them; and more particularly to Isabel. It was with a sigh that she rose from her chair, and advising May to go and look for George in the garden, slowly obeyed her mother’s summons. There were several callers in the room; but two well-known figures caught her eye as she entered, one seated on a sofa beside her mother, the other standing apart at one of the windows. They were Sir Cunninghame Thorpe and his bride, once Ada Thetford—he, handsome as ever, and quite as much alive to the fact; she, pretty and elegantly dressed, but hardly looking as happy as a young wife of three months might be supposed to do. There were people, indeed, who said Sir Cunninghame was already tiring of his bride, and that poor Lady Thorpe found her new home at the Moat very far from the paradise she had, perhaps, supposed it before coming there. But this was envy, of course—no one could really suppose Ada’s lot was anything but happy!

She rose eagerly now. Was it because Isabel knew something of her mother, and could talk with her of her old home, that she welcomed her so warmly? So the latter thought, for she

began at once about Gainsford friends and Gainsford news ; appearing so interested in them that she never once reverted to her present life. Isabel asked once about some improvements that had lately been made at the Moat, and whether she liked the place now.

'Oh, it's all very well,' she answered in a listless tone. 'I don't know what it was like before, but Cunninghame says he has done so much, that I suppose it must be improved in some way. It always seems to me very dreary. I like a nice light modern house ; those old ones are so gloomy.'

Isabel smiled a little. 'People never tell us so of ours,' she remarked with a glance round the low old-fashioned room in which they were sitting.

'No, indeed, but I forgot yours was so old, it looks so comfortable ; and then you are a large party, that makes all the difference ;' with a sigh. 'We were a large party, too, at home, and our house wasn't very modern, but we were never dull. You remember Fairfield, don't you ?' speaking eagerly, 'it was so pleasant there, and there were such nice gardens. Papa was building a new conservatory when I came away, and I wanted to have one like it here ; but Cunninghame says it can't be managed. I'm so sorry ; I should like to have had something here like home.'

'You don't think of the Moat, then, as your home ?' Isabel said ; and Ada coloured and glanced at her husband.

'Oh, yes ; but I don't think we either of us like it very much. Cunninghame says it's dull, and sometimes he talks of letting it and going to live somewhere else. If he would only go back to Gainsford, but I'm afraid there's no chance of that. He talks of London for part of the year ; and I hate London. It would be dreadful to be shut up there always in the season.'

Isabel was silent ; she thought it as well to let the subject drop, and after a pause returned to some Gainsford topic which diverted Ada's thoughts, until a piece of news mentioned by Rose Dacre caught every one's attention.

'O Mrs Tennent !' she exclaimed, 'what do you think we heard as we were coming here to-day ? I suppose it's true, because Mr Williams told us ; but it seems so odd, I can hardly believe it.'

'Mr Williams !' said Mrs Tennent in rather a freezing tone.

'Yes, Williams of the brewery, you know him surely ? We

were calling there to-day to give some order, and he told papa that the new rector is coming to St. Jude's next week—that's news, isn't it? And who do you think he is? Now, do guess; it's so very strange.'

Mrs Tennent shook her head. 'I don't know in the least. All I can hope is that he is some hard-working man. The parish has been shockingly neglected; and they are all a sad heathenish set there. They ought to have some one who will give himself up to his work, and not leave everything to his curate, some young fellow just ordained, as old Mr Elwes used to do.'

Rose laughed; a smothered laugh of amusement. 'Perhaps he won't keep a curate at all. I should say not; for he is quite young enough to do the work himself.' 'What do you say to Arthur Darrell! Yes, it's quite true,' as Mrs Tennent turned to her sharply; 'Mr Williams is one of the churchwardens, and of course he must know. He is coming next Tuesday.'

'Ahem!' Mrs Tennent coughed and was silent; and there was a dead pause in the room.

Poor Rose! She was famous for introducing inconvenient subjects, and the air of triumphant satisfaction with which she had looked round after imparting this piece of information, was considerably damped on perceiving the effect it produced upon some of the party; Mrs Tennent's look of haughty displeasure being too marked to escape the notice of any; while Elinor's confusion at the mention of Arthur's name, raised the pity of everybody. Isabel was the first to recover herself, and by leading the conversation back to old Mr Elwes, contrived to introduce some topic which could be discussed with safety. But when every one was talking again, Ada turned to her.

'I know something of your cousin. I have seen a good deal of him, when I have been staying with my uncle at Peele; and I like him very much. I should think he is just the man for St. Jude's, he goes to work so heartily; and he is an immense favourite with everybody.'

'Is he? We know nothing of him now; we have not seen him for years.'

'No, I know. But surely'—Ada spoke with some hesitation, 'it is so long ago, and he is so altered'—she stopped.

'It was not a thing mamma was likely to forgive,' Isabel said. 'I wonder he likes to come here,' she added in a low tone, as if speaking to herself rather than her companion.

'People don't care to throw away a living; especially when they are not likely to have many offered to them,' Ada answered, trying to smile. 'Besides, don't you think—perhaps he may hope'——

'If he has such hopes, he will be very much disappointed,' returned Isabel gravely. 'He knows well enough, mamma would never overlook anything of that sort; and if he cared for Elinor, he ought to have more consideration for her feelings than to run the chance of being thrown in her way, as he must if he comes here. But he never used to think of any one but himself and his own pleasure; and apparently he goes a good deal on the same principle now.'

Ah, Isabel! where were her thoughts of an hour before, her longings for the charity which thinks no evil.

Ada said no more, and an impatient summons to 'Lady Thorpe' from Sir Cunningshame, who was wishing to go, made her take her leave rather hurriedly. Elinor's eye followed them as they left the room; and when the door closed upon them, she turned to her sister with a smile.

"'Lady Thorpe!' And not married three months! Poor Ada!"

"'Poor Ada!'" said Mrs Tennent sharply, overhearing the remark. 'I see nothing "poor" about her. What are you pitying her for? It is some other people in my opinion who ought to be pitied! Those who don't know what is best for them, and who never exert themselves for their own interest. But Lady Thorpe! Nonsense! I wish you had shown half her wisdom, Elinor; you would have been much better off than you are now, or ever will be!'

'Have you heard this about Arthur?' she asked her husband that evening, in her shortest, driest tones. 'Do you know that he is coming back to Atherstone?'

'Yes, I have heard it,' the doctor answered. 'And a good thing for him it is! It is King's doing, it seems; he knows Lord Dyneworth, and, directly he heard old Elwes was dead, wrote off to him, without saying a word to Arthur, and got his promise at once. It speaks well for Arthur, that, my dear. He will be a great loss at Peele, they say.'

'A great pity he didn't stay there, then, for he is not wanted here. I think, Dr Tennent, after all that has passed, it would have been as well if he had kept out of our way. I don't under-

stand his coming to the place, when he knows we shall not receive him.'

'But, my dear, what could he do?' was the good-humoured answer. 'A man can't throw away a provision for life, even if he is under your displeasure'——

'And yours; you were as angry as I was, doctor. I hope you don't mean you are going to change now, simply because his circumstances have changed. It will be very wrong of you, if you do.'

The doctor coughed a little. 'My dear, my objection to him before was, that I thought him unsteady in his principles, as he showed himself by leading Elinor into such an engagement. And as he had no profession then, and was not likely to have a home to give her for years, I would not let her consider herself bound by any promise to him. If he had chosen to come forward openly and honourably, it would have been very different; I might have let her wait for him; as it was, he was not worth it. If he is changed though, now, for the better, as well as his prospects, I don't see—eh, Helen?'—— stopping short rather doubtfully.

'Don't see what? I don't see that his having a house and four or five hundred a year alters the past, or makes him have behaved one whit better, if yot mean that.'

'Certainly not. I only meant that the past might be past. And I can't help thinking Nelly would be very glad to see him again. She has behaved very well all these years, Helen; and if she still thinks of him, and he is of the same mind too, it seems hard to keep them apart any longer.'

'Elinor is a goose,' was the angry rejoinder, as a recollection of her daughter's blushing face, when Arthur had been spoken of that afternoon, rose to Mrs Tennent's mind. 'If she had done as she ought, she would have forgotten him long ago. Why didn't she marry Mr Powis last year, as any sensible girl would have done? And now, I suppose, she thinks she is sure to meet Arthur again! She knows you well enough, and how easily you can be persuaded into anything. But I am not going to have it, doctor. If you ask him to come here'——

'My dear, I don't mean to ask him,' said the doctor meekly. 'Of course I shall do nothing you don't wish; only'——

'Only you want everybody to do as they like; and if he got hold of you to-morrow, he could talk you into anything he pleased.

I know you, Dr Tennent. You haven't a spark of firmness or moral courage about you.'

The doctor laughed. Fortunately, he never took anything amiss that his wife chose to say.

'You have enough for both of us, my dear,' was all his answer now, with a very long yawn.

'I know it, and I mean to prove it, too. Arthur does not enter this house again—that is my determination. He will try to meet Elinor, no doubt—of course he will—that is what he is coming here for. And they will marry after all, I daresay; but it will not be with my consent. They may make a runaway match of it if they like; and a nice creditable thing that will be for him! A pretty clergyman he must make! And going to work a reformation! He had better reform himself first; practise before he preaches, I say. However, you hear what my wishes are, Dr Tennent. I never want to speak to him again, and it is my express desire that none of my family do so. Do you hear, doctor?' raising her voice.

'Quite well, my dear, thank you. I am not at all deaf.'

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### ST JUDE'S RECTORY.

SOME weeks had passed since that afternoon, and it was now a glowing day in May. The green blinds in the dining-room at St Jude's Rectory were drawn down to keep out the noonday sun, and the air around felt close and sultry. Every one was complaining more or less of the heat, which had come so unexpectedly; every one but Arthur Darrell, who on that particular day was sitting in a high-backed chair in the little room in his new home, which served him as dining, drawing-room, and

library all in one, and who was so busy writing that he had not a thought to give to weather cold or hot, fine or rainy. He was hard at work on his next Sunday morning's sermon, and so that he got that finished, other things were of little consequence to him. The last page, and almost the last sentence was reached, when the striking of the clock, and immediately afterwards a knock at the door, roused him from his labours.

'Come in,' he said, looking up. 'O Mrs Clarke, is it you?' as an old woman appeared with a dinner-tray. 'You'll have to wait, I think. Or—yes, just push those books away from that end of the table, and set the things down there.'

He went on writing very fast; while Mrs Clarke toddled about, making a good deal of noise with her thick boots, and grunting out apologies when she two or three times knocked down some of the books in moving them. There might have been a large party going to dine there, from the time she took for her operations; but the cloth was laid at last, and a knife and fork, &c., having been spread upon it, she toddled off again in search of the dinner itself. She had not been gone two minutes when her steps were heard returning, and there was another knock.

'Please, sir, Milly Brown's sent for some meat you promised her.'

'All right; I told her to send at half-past one, and we should have something she would like. What have you got for her?'

'Please, sir, there ain't nothing. I've just eat up all the cold meat; and there's only the chops for you.'

'Chops! oh, the very thing. Let her have one.'

'Please, sir, there ain't only two,' opening her eyes, and coming a little further into the room.

'Very well; give her the biggest, then, if it's a nice one; she won't eat more than that.'

'But'—— Mrs Clarke was evidently disturbed in mind. 'What am I to do, sir? One won't be enough for you. Am I to go for more?'

'No; I can't wait—I'm going out. You can bring me some bread and cheese; that will do as well.'

He was beginning to walk up and down the room, whistling thoughtfully to himself as he did so; but Mrs Clarke was still uneasy. She closed the door, and then said in a whisper—

'Awful bad woman, sir, that Milly Brown.'

'Is she?'

'Ay, that she is. I thought maybe you had heard nothing about her. And her family is all Methodies. So is she, for the matter of that; if she's any religion at all.'

'Oh! And don't Methodies eat meat, then?'

Mrs Clarke stared. 'Law, sir, I suppose so, if they can get it.'

'Then perhaps you wouldn't object to let her have that mutton-chop; and if she's a quarter as hungry as I am, she'll be glad of it. I'm just famishing.'

'Yes, sir, that's because you didn't eat your breakfast this morning. You let old Giles take you away before you'd half finished it. And you can't do nothing, sir, if you don't have your meals regular; excuse my saying it.'

'It is a fact I'm quite aware of, Mrs Clarke. May I have my dinner now?'

'To be sure, sir; it's all ready long ago. And Milly Brown's to have that chop, is she?'

'If you please; and anything else you can send with it—anything that Methodies will eat, I mean.'

'Well, sir, as far as that goes, they'll eat most things, I believe,' said Mrs Clarke solemnly. 'They're not like the Catholics that I've heard say won't eat anything their priests don't let them. But the Methodies, oh, they'll eat anything; they ain't noways particular.'

She left the room; and Arthur resumed his whistling and his walk while awaiting the arrival of his dinner. He did not linger long over it when it came, and a quarter of an hour after first sitting down, he was once more in motion, hurrying off to his girls' school, a room hired for the purpose in a small back street some distance from the rectory. There was no schoolhouse as yet, though one was in contemplation; and boys and girls were consequently distributed in different localities; their numbers, however, jointly not amounting to more than seventy or eighty. This was already an improvement, though, on a few weeks back, when thirty had been the outside of the attendance there, and that by no means a regular one. There were a great many little heads raised now from their books and work when Arthur came in, and a great many smiling looks followed him as he walked among them, speaking first to one and then to another, taking up their books to see what they were learning, and asking droll



questions to find out how much they knew about the lesson. Nearly an hour's reading and explanations with the first class followed, and then he was off again for several visits amongst the very poorest of his parishioners—people who lived in the lowest of the many low courts and alleys with which the district abounded; where foul smells and a close reeking atmosphere greeted him at every step, and where the pure breath of heaven seemed never to have penetrated.

'They'll be having some horrible fever here one of these days,' he said to himself, taking a jump across a gutter which appeared to have received the outpourings of all the houses in the neighbourhood, and then pausing for a moment before a door from which some particularly overpowering odour proceeded. 'Surely something might be done for the drainage here; it's enough to breed a pestilence; and in such weather as this, too!'

He stood for a moment or two in thought, looking down the close, filthy alley, on which the hot rays of the afternoon sun were streaming; and then went on up the creaking staircase leading to different rooms, each occupied by its respective family or families, in various stages of want and misery. He was at home in one and all of them, and contrived, somehow, to win a welcome from most of their occupants, although there were a few who at first looked rather coldly on the 'new parson,' and seemed disposed to regard his visits as an interference. But Arthur did not interfere. To make friends first, before attempting anything else, was his plan of proceeding; and he listened to and sympathised with their troubles, but found no fault, and did very little, at present, even in the way of suggesting or advising. Many of them were old, and he was young; and many more were deplorably ignorant, and had prejudices against which it would have been useless, on a first acquaintance, to combat. He did not attempt it, but set to work to make friends with all; and most of them responded to his amicable advances: many of those who had been at first inclined to resist them, giving way, after a time, before his genial manner and easy off-hand way. 'He was a nice gentleman, and hadn't a bit of pride about him,' was the opinion pronounced by several, in discussing him afterwards; and there were some houses which felt all the brighter for his visit that afternoon. The effect upon himself, however, of what he had seen and heard, was not cheering; and as he

left, his step was slower than it had been, and he looked weary and jaded.

An hour later he was coming out of a cottage where he had been paying a visit, and the garden of which opened into a lane on the Copelands road, when he heard a child's voice in distress. He looked round, and not many paces from him saw a little girl, with a large doll in her arms, standing on the defensive against a huge dog, which, although she did not seem to understand its intentions, was bent on having a game of play with her. She evidently suspected it of murderous designs on her treasure, and her fear and perplexity were very great.

'Get away, you great big thing,' she was saying in a tone which was meant to be threatening, but which, from inward perturbation, sounded so mild that the 'big thing' no doubt thought he was asked to come a little nearer; and wagged his tail formidably in response to the invitation. 'Get away, you big creature, you have no business here. Go away, I say, this minute!' And she gave a stamp with her foot; at which the dog, considering this part of a game in which he was to take his share, gave a spring and a bound forwards, frightening the child almost out of her senses, and drawing a scream from her, though she still stood her ground heroically; not daring indeed to turn her back, for fear of being pursued by her enemy. Her relief at the appearance of any one who was likely to stand her ally in the encounter was extreme; and she flew to Arthur's side.

'Take him away! Please take him away. He frightens me and Lady Flora,' with another little shriek as the dog made an advance. She caught Arthur's hand, and clung to it convulsively; nor did she let it go until with his stick he had driven the big dog off, and she had seen it turn tail and slink into one of the gardens near. Then she seemed to remember that the gentleman whose protection she had implored was a stranger to her; and she drew away her hand, and looked demurely shy.

'You needn't be afraid of him now,' Arthur said kindly. 'But I'll take you past these cottages, and then you'll be sure of not meeting him again. Which way were you going?'

She pointed to a farmhouse at the turning of the lane. 'I only came up here to get some flowers,' she said. 'I had got a great many, when that big dog came and frightened me and Lady Flora,' kissing her doll. 'But I'll go back now.'

She raised her eyes as she spoke, and for the first time he

caught sight of her face, which before had been so shaded by her hat that he had seen nothing but the long curls which fell over her shoulders. But now, as she looked up, he started. Those large eyes, that hair, those features, brought back a vision of girlish loveliness that belonged to years gone by—a vision of the cousin whose early death had been in part caused by his own wrong-doing. He could not be mistaken, surely—that must be her child before him; and he was strangely moved at the thought.

‘What is your name, my little girl?’ he said, stooping down, that he might the better see that face, and look into the dark wondering eyes.

‘May,’ was the answer with some shyness, and she hugged her doll again.

‘May? May what?’ he asked.

‘Not May anything—it isn’t May at all really; it’s Lisa Mary Tennent; only they call me May.’

He made no answer; but he looked at her so long and earnestly that she grew a little uneasy.

‘May I go now?’ she said. ‘Aunt Nelly is down there; she’ll be waiting for me. May I go?’

‘Yes, certainly. Good-bye, little lady;’ but she looked at him again—evidently she was not satisfied.

‘Won’t you come with me? You said you would;’ speaking very shyly, and the colour coming into her face as she glanced towards the place where her enemy had disappeared.

‘What, past those cottages? To be sure I will. I had forgotten.’ He held out his hand, which she took in a very confident manner; present fears overcoming her natural shyness with strangers, and they walked on together; Arthur, however, kept strangely silent by the grasp of that little hand, and May too busy making apprehensive observations on the hedges as they passed, to notice his silence or say anything herself. They had cleared the last of the houses, when a figure appeared at the turning coming out from the farm, and she exclaimed joyfully—

‘There’s Aunt Nelly! She’s looking for me!’

Arthur raised his head. Yes, there was Elinor standing by the farmhouse gate; and as the evening sunlight fell upon her face, he could almost fancy that even at that distance he could distinguish her features. Did she see and know him too? He stopped short.

'I can't go any further, my little girl; but I'll wait here till you get safe to your aunt. You won't be afraid to go alone now, will you?'

'No. But—won't you come with me?'

'I'm going the other way,' he said, pointing over the field. 'Good-bye.'

May raised her eyes to his, and as she met the smile with which he was looking at her, she held out the flowers she had gathered.

'Will you take them?' she said. She meant them by way of thanks, but she had no sooner given them than she was seized with a fit of shyness, and without waiting for a word in return, ran away as fast as her little feet would carry her. He saw her reach Elinor's side, and look back towards the place where he was standing, as if giving some explanation of what she had been doing; and then, afraid of being recognised, he retraced his steps quickly, and crossing a stile at some little distance, made his way back to Atherstone.

'Why, May dear, where have you been?' Elinor said, as her little niece joined her. 'I have been looking for you everywhere. Who was that with you?'

'I don't know; he came out of one of those houses, and took care of me past a great big dog up there. I went to get some flowers, and the dog came after me, and wanted to eat up Lady Flora. I wouldn't let him,' continued May, valiantly; 'but I was very frightened; and then that gentleman came and drove him away. He had such a nice face, and such nice kind eyes—just like yours, Aunt Nelly; and do you know, he was something like you too.'

'Like me! Nonsense, May dear!'

'He was. He was really like you a little. He asked me what my name was too, and I told him. I liked his face very much, only he looked so hard at me; and he looked very sorry too—I don't know why.'

Elinor was silent. She shaded her face from the rays of the setting sun, and watched the retreating figure going up the lane—watched it not only there, but across one of the distant meadows until it was lost from sight behind some trees; and even then she did not move. She stood still and silent, until May, who had been dancing backwards and forwards before her, recalled her to herself, by a sudden exclamation, and a pause in her steps.

‘O Aunt Nelly! Aunt Nelly, look at the sky! how pretty it is!’

And then she saw the sun had gone down, and remembered it was getting very late, and they had a long walk before them. So they turned to go; and all the way home May talked of the gentleman with the kind eyes, and wondered whether she should ever see him again. She was never tired of describing him, and telling what he had said to her; until Lane, who, with every one else at home, came in for an account of her adventure, exclaimed somewhat indiscreetly—

‘Why, bless the child, it must have been Mr Arthur himself! No doubt of it, indeed—it’s just like him!’

May opened a pair of large wondering eyes. ‘Who is Mr Arthur?’ she asked, looking very much puzzled.

‘Hold your tongue, May, and don’t be troublesome!’ remarked Mrs Tennent, with an angry glance at the nurse. ‘Take her away, Lane. It’s time she was in bed, instead of talking nonsense here.’

May took some little hops across the room, and finished by jumping two or three times over a low ottoman that stood in her way. ‘I wasn’t talking nonsense,’ she said in a very audible tone. ‘Aunt Nelly,’ stopping short in front of Elinor, ‘who is Mr Arthur? Do you know him?’ with a mischievous glance at Mrs Tennent as she spoke.

Elinor’s face flushed crimson, and Mrs Tennent’s anger rose. ‘May, if I hear you ask that again, or talk any more about this walk of yours, I shall whip you. Go to bed this minute.’

At which speech May looked very much astonished; but being perfectly aware that her grandmother’s threats were never uttered in anything but sober earnest, departed without another word; though not apparently in a very subdued frame of mind, for she dropped a funny little curtsey at the door, and her eyes were dancing with suppressed merriment as she vanished. She rushed up-stairs at the top of her speed, pausing at the top till her old nurse came up too.

‘Lane dear,’ she said in a whisper then, ‘who is Mr Arthur? Won’t you tell me?’

‘Hush, dear,’ said Lane, made wise by Mrs Tennent’s warning look. ‘Hush; never mind.’

‘But I want to know. Why won’t you tell me?’

‘I can’t, dear. Now never you mind,’ returned Lane with

some dignity. 'Come to bed like a good child, and don't ask any more questions.'

'But why not?' persisted May. 'It's unkind of you, Lane. I'll ask papa when he comes home—he'll tell me;' in a tone of triumph.

'Ay, dear, perhaps he will,' said Lane, capturing her as she seemed inclined to take a swing on the banisters. 'Don't you go climbing there, Miss May; you'll be tumbling over, if you don't mind.'

'I know he will,' May said, suffering herself to be led off a prisoner to the nursery. 'I wonder whether papa is like him. I hope he is. I like Mr Arthur's face so much;' dwelling with much mischievous satisfaction upon the forbidden words.

'Ah, Miss May, you are a naughty child,' said Lane, trying to appear angry, but finishing off with a kiss. 'But you mustn't talk in that way; you heard what your grandmamma said.'

'Yes, I know. But why did she, Lane? Has he done anything wrong? Oh, but he can't have; he looks too good.'

'Miss May, how you do go on,' exclaimed Lane, despairingly. 'Can't you leave off talking, and sit still while I get these boots unfastened? You won't be in bed to-night.'

'Lane, how tiresome you are! You never tell me anything!' And May gave a jerk and pulled away her feet, coiling them up under her on the chair, and not being persuaded to put them out again without a great deal of coaxing. 'Well, will you tell me if papa is like him?' she said, when Lane had at length possessed herself of the two wriggling little feet. 'You may tell me that. Is he?'

'Not a bit. Why, dear, you've seen your papa's picture often enough. You know what he's like, surely?'

May's face fell. 'Aunt Mary says that was his picture a long, long time ago; and I thought he wasn't the same now. I don't like that picture very much. I like Mr—you know who—a great deal better. He's much beautifuller.'

Lane smiled a little. 'Well, never mind now, my darling. Wait till your papa comes, and then you'll see whether you like him or not. You mustn't always go by looks, you know,' she added sententiously. 'And now come to bed, there's a good child. It's past eight, and you ought to have been asleep long ago.'

So May was carried off and consigned to her small bed ; her last words as she was tucked up for the night being, ‘ that she wondered where Mr Arthur was, and hoped she should see him again *very* soon.’

And Arthur sat in his room that evening, and for the first time felt how lonely it was. His class being gone, and Mrs Clarke having brought in his tea, he was left in undisturbed solitude ; and he looked round the silent room and thought how cheerless and unhomelike it was. Never had the table with its black teapot and solitary cup and saucer looked so bare as it did that evening. Not even May’s flowers, which stood in a glass at his side, could brighten the place. He set a chair at last opposite his own, and tried to imagine it filled by the person he would most have liked to see there ; but it was hard work to keep up the illusion, and he went back in thought to the glimpse he had had of Elinor that evening. And then he found himself fancying what they were all doing at that moment at the Priory ; and wondering what changes had come over the old place since the days when he had been one of them.

But these were thoughts which were not to be encouraged : so he started up, and getting out his desk, plunged into a calculation of what the costs of his new schoolrooms were likely to be ; and in making rough estimates of building and teachers’ expenses, and forming plans for parish work, he contrived to banish for the time all recollections of the Priory, and the hopes that had once been centred in it.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

## DISAPPOINTED HOPES.

WHILE Arthur sat in his silent room that evening, a different scene was going on at the Priory.

They were a small party there now. With Mary and Constance away, Fred in London walking the hospitals, and Charley at Rugby, their numbers were greatly diminished; and Dr Tennent, as he sat in his easy-chair after tea that night, and looked about him, could not help sighing as he missed the many bright faces which had once met there. Some it was useless to regret. There was one—the brightest and gayest of all—who had long passed away, not only from her own home, but from all earthly care and love. And there was another on whom the doors of that home were closed, and who, though living so near, must be a stranger to those who had once so warmly welcomed him. But there were others who, although absent for a time, might yet come back; and the doctor, who liked nothing better than to have numbers round him and hear cheerful voices in his rooms, found himself longing for those absent ones, and feeling quite down-hearted because he had been hearing that Mary, who was at the sea-side with Constance on account of the latter's ill-health, had written to say she thought they had better remain at Firsby some weeks longer. And where was Percy, too? Isabel, who on this day, as on so many preceding ones, had felt sure each post must bring something from him, had again been doomed to disappointment. Her grave face, as she sat a little apart from the others silently occupied with a book, did not tend to make her father feel more cheerful. But who ever knew Dr Tennent give way to melancholy?

‘Now, then, how quiet everybody is to-night,’ he said, throwing away his newspaper. ‘I don't come home to sit moping in this way. Susan, can't you give us some music?’

‘Yes, papa, in three minutes; but I'm so busy just now.’ She was arranging a wreath to be worn at a dance the following



evening. 'Don't you think that will do, Nelly? It looks ten times better than it did.'

'It's lovely,' said Elinor, with a laugh. 'I think I shall be wishing my dancing-days were back again that I might have the pleasure of wearing such things. As they are not, however, I can play till you are ready. What will you have to-night, papa?'

She walked to the piano and was looking out her music, when there was a ring at the door-bell.

'Ah! somebody sending for me, of course,' said the doctor. 'It's always the way when I think I'm going to be comfortable for an hour. When will people learn to be taken ill at convenient times? Now, then, Sarah,' as the door opened, 'who is it? Mrs Briggs, I'll be bound. Tiresome woman!'

Mrs Briggs was an especial favourite among the doctor's numerous protégées, and Elinor laughed as she turned to the door. But it was not the servant who was coming in. Instead there was a tall, dark figure standing there; and as she caught sight of it, the music fell from her hand. It was flung away, indeed, and she started forward.

'Percy!'

Yes, it was Percy who stood there. Percy—aged and careworn, indeed, and bronzed with travel and exposure to the burning suns of Africa; but it was Percy still—come back once more after long wanderings to the home of his boyhood, to the home which he had last left on his wedding-day, more than six years and a half ago. And, with that hurried exclamation, Elinor sprang to meet him. All that had once for a time caused a coldness between them had long since been forgiven and forgotten, and there was nothing to mar her happiness in seeing him again. With a cry of joy she threw herself into his arms; and her sudden movement made every one in the room start up.

'Why, Percy! how extraordinary!'

Mrs Tennent never liked surprises, and whether she were quite pleased now, was uncertain; but about anybody else there could be no doubt. Isabel alone stood aloof. She had started up with the others, but there she had paused, doubting what her reception might be; and with face crimson with agitation and eyes filled with tears, she stood waiting until that first burst of greetings was over; chilled by the recollection of their last miserable parting, and the thought that, during all the long years which had since passed, no word of explanation, of excuse on her part, had been offered; not one

kindly message had ever passed between them. Her feeling had always been that she had sinned too deeply to be forgiven, and there had been no advance on his side to encourage her to seek the pardon for which she was yearning. Coldly he had parted from her six years before, and coldly she knew he had thought of her ever since. His love for her was gone, and only hers for him remained—hers, deep, absorbing as it had ever been. What she would have given then to be in her sisters' place, none could tell. Neither of them cared for him as she did; but they could meet him in undisguised delight, while she must stand apart. Those first moments of his return, great as was the happiness they brought, had, perhaps, as much of bitterness mingled with them as any she had ever spent.

But that noisy burst of greetings was over, and then came the moment she had most dreaded; for Susan, observing she had not moved, exclaimed—

‘Why, Isabel, you haven’t said a word all this time! How odd of you! What are you doing there?’

She was obliged to come forward then, and with heightened colour advanced to meet her brother. He kissed her—he could not well do otherwise; but the kiss was cold and chilling, and he did not speak. Perhaps he expected some words of welcome from her; but if so, he was mistaken; for none came. The colour faded from her face, and she drew back, cold and impassible as himself. But there was no one to notice her—her sisters talked too much to observe her extreme quietness; and Percy, when he had explained how, after an unusually long passage in consequence of contrary winds, they had only landed that morning; and how, leaving his luggage to be passed at the Custom-house, he had come on at once, knowing he could reach home before any letter could get there—when he had told all this, he relapsed into silence; and as his eye went round the old familiar room, Isabel remembered for the first time the pain that return home must be to him. How could there indeed be anything but painful associations connected with the place where he had wooed and won his bride, and which he had never visited since he left it with her? There could be little there that did not remind him of her; and she saw his look now rest on each well-known object, and linger longest on the spot where Lisa had often sat, and which she had been used to call her ‘favourite corner.’ She had sat there on the evening when her engagement had

first been made known, as Isabel well remembered; and she wondered whether her brother remembered it too—whether he remembered all that had passed that evening. He turned away abruptly.

‘Where is May?’ he asked. ‘Not in bed, is she?’

‘I hope so,’ said Elinor, smiling. ‘You don’t think we keep her up so late as this. But I’ll go and fetch her. It won’t hurt her once in a way to lose her sleep.’

‘Nonsense, Elinor,’ said Mrs Tennent. ‘If Percy wants to see her, let him go and look at her as she is. Pray don’t be waking her up; we sha’n’t have her asleep again to-night if you do.’

Percy was a little disappointed. He wanted something more than to see his child; he was longing to speak to her, to have her in his arms. But perhaps the wish was unreasonable; at any rate, after waiting so long, he might wait a few hours longer; and smothering his disappointment, he acquiesced in Mrs Tennent’s decision.

‘Yes, never mind; don’t wake her,’ he said. ‘I’ll go up-stairs. Which room is she in?’

And followed by Elinor—for Isabel did not move—he strode away up-stairs, and in a few moments was standing at May’s bedside.

She lay in a sleep so profound that there was no fear of disturbing her; her dear Lady Flora clasped in her arms, and her face half buried in the bundle of rags of which that aristocratic doll chiefly consisted. Elinor smiled as she partly disengaged the precious treasure from her embrace, and pushed back some of the prettily disordered hair, that her brother might see the sweet little face resting on its pillow, and looking so lovely in the calm slumbers of childhood. Little did May guess who was standing over her, watching her as he had often watched her in her unconscious babyhood, and tracing once more in her young features the likeness to her lost mother. He did not speak at first, but there was a long, long kiss; and then he knelt by her side and gazed at her as if he could never gaze enough. For now there was something for him to love again, and with no wide seas rolling between them. No more waking morning after morning with the thought that his child was far away; the wishes, the prayers of years had been granted, and once again they were together, never more to be separated. She

would make up to him for all he had lost ; she would love him as he loved her ; and she would henceforth be the treasure—the delight of his life.

‘My little May ! My precious child !’ he murmured. ‘Thank God you have been kept for me !’

And there was another kiss—so long, so passionate, that sound as May’s slumber was, for a moment it seemed to disturb it. But it was only for a moment ; and rendered more cautious then, he knelt on in silence, looking at her with a long, earnest gaze, which told of the fullest, most intense affection—affection so full that it seemed hard to keep it to himself—he was longing to have it returned, to hear the sound of her voice, and feel her arms round him.

‘She will be a great comfort to me, Elinor,’ he said. ‘You don’t know how I have wanted her all these years. And now really to have seen her again ! It seems more than I can believe. She will be the great happiness of my life.’

‘Yes, I am sure she will. But the worst of it is that we shall have to give her up,’ Elinor said, with rather an unsteady voice. ‘There is no one here who likes to think of that. She is everybody’s pet, and I don’t know who will miss her most ; unless, indeed, it is Isabel. It will almost break her heart, I believe, when she goes.’

‘Isabel !’

‘Yes, Isabel. We all spoil May, I am afraid,’ trying to smile. ‘But Isabel is worse than any of us. And May is so fond of her.’

Percy made no answer, but once more he stooped over his little girl to take another long lingering look at her ; and then they went away. They returned to the drawing-room, where during the rest of the evening, which was not long, he was almost as silent as Isabel herself. He made his long journey that day an excuse for getting away early to his own room ; somewhat to the disappointment of Elinor and Susan, who had so much to talk about that they would have had no objection to sitting up half the night. But when he was gone there was no inducement for any one to remain any longer, and, one by one, ‘good-nights’ were exchanged, and everybody disappeared up-stairs—Mrs Ten-  
nent lingering, as usual, to the last to see that everything was safe and in its proper place.

‘He is dreadfully out of spirits,’ the doctor remarked as he was

lighting his candle. 'I hope it only is as he says, that he is tired with his journey ; but I don't know. It must be a great trial to him coming back here ; and I'm afraid he has never got over that poor child's death yet.'

'What ! Not Lisa's ? Impossible !' Mrs Tennent looked so disdainful at the bare suggestion that her husband thought he had made a very foolish speech. 'Why, it's six years since, isn't it ? The idea of any man in his senses making himself miserable all that time. What could put such an idea into your head, doctor ?'

'I don't know ; and I hope it isn't so. It is a long time, as you say ; but still—he certainly was very much attached to her. I don't think you know what she was to him. And he's not one to forget soon—he never was.'

'He's very different from all the rest of the men, then,' returned Mrs Tennent. 'You forget fast enough as a general thing. Not that I mean to blame you for it,' she added ; remembering, perhaps, that she was a second wife. 'People were not meant to make themselves unhappy for ever ; but there's a proper medium in everything. As for Percy not having got over that, I don't believe it. He'll be marrying again soon ; and quite right too. He ought to do so for May's sake ; she will want some one to look after her when he takes her away from here.'

'Well, my dear, as far as that goes, I suppose Mary will do that. We must make up our minds now to lose her whenever May goes. She has quite settled, you know, to live with him.'

'Till he marries,' said Mrs Tennent with emphasis. 'She may go for the present, but she will be back again before many months are over ; you see if she isn't. And now, when do you mean to finish lighting that candle ? I am going to put the lamp out.'

And Mrs Tennent plunged the drawing-room into obscurity, and then proceeded to make her nightly tour of inspection round the house, while the doctor slowly walked away up-stairs.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

## MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

PERCY left his room early the next morning. Childish steps passing his door, and a childish voice and a merry laugh under his window, had been the first sounds that greeted him on waking ; and he had lost no time in dressing and hurrying out, that he might find his little girl and make acquaintance with her at once. The breakfast-room was empty when he went in, but Elinor was outside the open window tying up a rose-tree, and he joined her ; his first question being for May.

‘She was here a short time ago,’ was the answer, ‘but I don’t know where she is gone now. I wanted her to come with me and knock at your door, but she was frightened and ran away. I suppose she went back to the nursery.’

But no : Prince’s bark was heard just then not very far off ; and, turning, Elinor caught sight of the flutter of a little frock among the trees in the green walk. May was there then—amusing herself in some, it was to be hoped, not forbidden way ; and with a few misgivings as to what the nature of her employment might be, Elinor walked down with her brother to the place where she had seen the child, calling to her at the same time. But May, either having doubts whether mud-pie making had left her in a presentable state, or else being seized with a fit of shyness, did not respond to the summons, vanishing suddenly instead behind some tall shrubs. Unfortunately for her, however, her aunt knew her haunts, and intercepted her retreat, just as she was whisking off to the house. Before she knew what was happening to her, she found herself caught up by her father, fast clasped in his arms, and covered with kisses.

Poor Percy ! how his face lighted up at that moment, and how happy he looked now that he once more had his child—his Lisa’s child in his arms. For years he had been thinking of that time, and picturing to himself what it would be. In long hours of loneliness and sadness, the thought of her had been with him to cheer his solitude and his sorrow. And now that time was come. It had seemed but half a meeting the night before, but it was all he had ever hoped for now. Lisa’s little child was in his arms, and he

had seen her eyes, soft and bright like her mother's, raised to his face with the wistful look he knew so well and had missed so long.

But great happiness seldom comes without alloy ; and so Percy found it now. He had thought so much of his child, and all home letters had been so entirely filled with her, that long as it was since he had left her, she was no stranger to him ; and he had forgotten that he might, or rather must, be one to her. It was with a feeling of the keenest disappointment that he saw her turn from him, and hide her face ; which at first no persuasions could induce her to raise again.

'Why, May, my little child, won't you look at me ?' he said. 'Don't you know who I am, my Queen Mab—my little queen of the fairies ?'

But although she raised her head for a moment at the sound of his voice, and on hearing the names which he had often given her in his letters, she dropped it again when she caught sight of his face. That plain dark man who looked so worn and sad was not at all the father she had pictured to herself, and it was very clear she was afraid of him. No entreaties could induce her to speak to or even look at him again ; and Elior, who saw the large tears in her eyes, persuaded her brother, much against his will, to set her down.

'She is always shy,' she said in a low voice. 'You must not mind it ; she will know you better by and by. Leave her to me a little now.'

And May, released, gladly took refuge with her aunt, to whose hand she clung in evident relief ; keeping close beside her, and putting as great a distance as possible between herself and the tall grave-looking man, on whom—now that she was away from him—she turned her eyes at times, with a gaze half of fear, half of curiosity ; though she showed no inclination to increase their friendly relations. He could not win a word or a smile from her ; and when they returned to the house to breakfast, and she discovered that the high chair in which she always sat had been placed next the seat which he was about to occupy, she pulled it hastily away, pushing it instead into a vacant space between her grandfather and Isabel.

Dr Tennent laughed as he noticed the movement.

'Why, pet, this isn't your proper place,' he said. 'What are you doing here ? Don't you want to sit next papa ?' patting her head as he spoke.

Pet grew crimson, and looked very shy. 'No, thank you.'

'No, thank you! Why, what's that for, my little girl?'

'I'd rather not,' and she took a draught of milk from her tiny cup, looking over the top of it at Mrs Tennent, who shook her head at her.

'Now May, I hope you don't mean to be shy and silly. I shall be very angry if you are. I don't know what you will do with her,' turning to Percy. 'Mary has spoilt her, I believe; and I am sure every one else has. You will find her very troublesome.'

But Percy, though truth to say he was hurt and disappointed at his child's coldness and evident aversion to him, only smiled.

'Never mind,' he said. 'We shall get on well together by and by, I have no doubt. She does not know me yet; but we shall be good friends soon.'

And at the sound of the kind voice, May looked at him for a moment as if the process of making friends might not be such a long one after all; but unfortunately while speaking he put up his glass to see her better, and the sight of that seemed at once to renew all her apprehensions. She shrank away and hid her face on Isabel's shoulder.

Mrs Tennent was very angry. 'I tell you what it is, May—you are a naughty child; and if you don't sit up at once and eat your breakfast properly, I shall lock you in my closet for the rest of the morning. I am not going to let you behave in that rude way.'

'Sit up, my precious,' whispered Isabel. 'You mustn't be silly; you are not afraid, are you?'

'Yes, I am. I'll go into the closet, please, I won't mind it,' said poor May, who had a horror in general of that place of punishment, but seemed to consider it now far preferable to remaining in the room with her strange, grave-looking father. Some little whispering, however, which took place between her and her aunt, had the effect of restoring her equanimity, and she sat up then and went on with her breakfast, only casting furtive glances from time to time across the table; while Percy, disliking to hear her found fault with on his account, and thinking she was more likely to come round if left to herself, said no more, and took care that no notice should be taken of her by the others. But it was with a sigh that, when breakfast was over, he saw her slip down from her chair, and evidently fearing to be detained by him, make her escape from the room. He saw her several times in the course of the morning running



about the garden, and heard her merry laughter and her little voice carolling as gaily as that of some bird; but it was useless to seek her out—he would but have stopped that laughter and merriment. He could only sit and watch her unperceived, feeling how different this return was from all he had ever looked for, and contrasting sadly these first hours at home with his last spent there years ago.

‘It is a pity she is so shy with you,’ said Elinor; ‘she has always talked so much of you, that I hoped she would be sociable at once. But you won’t have very long to wait, I daresay.’

The waiting, however, was longer than she expected. May had no fancy for him, and did not care to show a preference where none existed.

‘I don’t like him a bit,’ she said to Lane; ‘I wish he wasn’t my papa—oh, I do wish it! and I wish he had never come home. He isn’t like anybody here, and he’s so old and so ugly; I don’t love him at all! I wish he would go away to-morrow—go quite away, and never come back any more.’ And catching sight of him in the distance, just as she had delivered herself of these sentiments, she flew away and hid herself in some out-of-the-way corner, till she was quite sure that all danger of meeting him was over.

And this went on for some time: all attempts to come to a better understanding with her being a failure, in spite of the repeated scoldings she received from Mrs Tennent, till Percy, not liking to hear his little girl so often found fault with, begged rather peremptorily she might be left to herself. He had no wish to force her to anything against her inclination, and had no doubt she would come round by and by.

And he was right. A few mornings later he asked her if she would not go for a walk with him—a request which she declined in the most steadfast manner. He said no more, but something in his face as he turned away—something of sadness, perhaps, at being so slighted by his child—seemed to strike her, and while walking up and down the room afterwards with her old rag doll, Lady Flora, in her arms, she paused several times near the open window to watch him on a garden bench close by, where he had seated himself on her refusal. Her thoughts were evidently engrossed with him, though he did not notice her; and so absorbed was she in the observations she was making, that her plaything fell to the ground unheeded, and, stealing up

to the window, she was looking at him with intent, earnest eyes, when Mrs Tennent came into the room. Her entrance was unfortunate, for, passing the doll that lay on the floor, its appearance there caused her no little displeasure. She had often lectured poor May on her untidiness, and threatened to make away with any rubbish she might leave about ; and angry now at the sight of the offending favourite, she picked it up, and, ringing the bell, ordered the servant who came in to put it at the back of the kitchen fire. It was nothing better, it was true, than a bundle of rags, but it was May's treasure—the doll she loved best out of half-a-dozen more she had, and her despair upon hearing the order for this summary disposal of her property was great in the extreme. In an agony she flew to the rescue, but it was too late. Mrs Tennent kept her off ; and although the servant hesitated at first, appearing very reluctant to obey the command, a look from her mistress told her it was not to be trifled with. She departed, and as May saw the door close upon her she gave way to a storm of passion beyond all control. She was like a little fury, stamping the ground, and being utterly beside herself with rage. 'That stupid old thing' (she always lisped when in a hurry or excited), 'wicked,' 'unkind,' 'cruel,' were the mildest of the childish invectives with which she loaded her grandmother, greatly to the dismay of Isabel, who was sitting by.

'Hush, May, dear ; don't talk in that way ! You don't know what you are saying,' she remonstrated ; but she might as well have spoken to the wind. May's fury was not to be so easily quenched ; and Mrs Tennent's anger was roused by her audacity.

'May, you very naughty child, have you the least idea whom you are talking to ?' she exclaimed. 'A little girl like you to speak in that way ! You shall be well whipped for your impertinence.'

A sentence which brought May to herself ; her passion subsiding suddenly. For a moment she looked at her grandmother, quailed by her air of displeasure ; and then she fled—to the door first, but not being able to open that fast enough with her small hands, she turned, and struck by a fresh thought, took refuge by the side of her father, whom her burst of anger had brought to the window.

'Papa,' in a voice of frantic entreaty—'please, papa, keep me—don't let her take me !' And she clung to him imploringly as Mrs Tennent advanced across the room.

Percy stooped down and raised her in his arms.

‘Excuse me, madam : I don’t know what the child has done, but whatever it is, she is not to be punished for it ; I shall not allow it.’

Mrs Tennent stood aghast. ‘What, not after such impertinence ! Do you mean a child like her is to say what she likes, and you are going to encourage her in it ? I never saw any one in such a passion in my life, or heard such rudeness. If you let her think she is to act in such a way without being punished for it, you are extremely wrong.’

But Percy only drew his little girl close to him. Right or wrong, she had thrown herself on his protection : and with her arms round his neck, as they were now, he was not going to give her up.

‘I can’t help it,’ he said. ‘If she has been rude, she will be sorry for it by and by, I am sure. But I can’t let her be punished.’

Mrs Tennent was very angry. ‘If that is the plan you mean to pursue with her, the sooner you take her from here the better. I shall not submit to be insulted in my own house.’

She left the room in high displeasure ; May’s first feeling on her departure being one of exultation ; but when she came to reflect afterwards upon the loss of her treasure, and still more when Elinor, who came into the room, was told of what had passed, her face changed. Both her aunts looked so very grave that her conscience began to work, and she burst into tears.

‘Don’t cry, my little girl,’ Percy said. ‘No one is going to be angry with you. I won’t have her scolded, Elinor ; she had a great deal to provoke her, poor child !’

‘I don’t want to scold,’ Elinor answered. ‘I am only thinking what is to be done. Mamma is very angry, and not without reason, I think. I am afraid May really was rude,’ looking at her sister as she spoke.

‘I am afraid she was,’ Isabel was beginning rather unwillingly ; but she was cut short by Percy’s remarking rather bitterly, ‘She is sure to have been in the wrong if you ask Isabel about it ;’ the tone in which he spoke bringing the colour to her face, and she was silent, while May’s tears redoubled.

‘I was naughty, Aunt Isabel is right,’ she exclaimed. ‘But oh, my poor Lady Flora is all burnt ! I’m so sorry !’

And there came another childish burst of grief, which Percy

in vain endeavoured to calm, though whether it were caused by the recollection of her own passion, or by her loss, was not easy to discover. Penitence, however, seemed really to be at the bottom of it; for when Elinor had taken her in hand a little, and under her auspices the tears at length ceased to flow, she was heard suggesting that perhaps she had better go and tell her grandmamma she was sorry she had been so rude—she really was sorry now; a proposition of which her aunts at once approved, and to which Percy offered no objection; though, as he said, he considered she had had so much provocation that he did not wonder she had been angry.

‘But I won’t have her punished,’ he added peremptorily. ‘The idea of such a thing!’ growing quite angry as he spoke.

So May, escorted by Elinor, went off to make her peace with Mrs Tennent; not an easy matter, for that lady was most seriously displeased; and it was only the knowledge of her utter powerlessness to act any further in the affair which induced her at length to listen to May’s childish expressions of penitence, while she wound up a long lecture which she bestowed on the culprit with the assurance that it was the first and last time she would pass over such a thing, and that if it were ever repeated, she would most assuredly punish her severely.

‘Papa won’t let you,’ was the triumphant rejoinder, which, however, was immediately checked by her aunt, while Mrs Tennent prudently forbore to notice the remark—and May, released from her presence, returned to the drawing-room, to scramble upon her father’s knee and cram his mouth with barley-sugar; while she whispered in his ear, that she *would* love him now—she would love him very much, and never be afraid of him any more; a compact which she sealed with the first kiss she had ever given him.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

‘WILL YE THINK OF HER WHO DIED?’

AND from that day Percy's life began to change. The void left within him by Lisa's death, and which the lapse of long years had failed to fill up, disappeared by slow degrees. With the new interests awakened in him by his child, he ceased to feel his loneliness; and his sadness was chased away by her mirth. It would have been a shame, he said to himself, to let even the shadow of grief intrude upon her joyousness; and in the wish to meet her in her lightheartedness he forgot his own heavy sorrow. And when she found he could sympathise with all her childish feelings, and enter into all her amusements; that he would give up anything at any time, no matter what he was doing or where he was going, to please her—she was not slow in taking advantage of the discovery, and seldom left him long alone; while she soon learned to wonder how it was she had ever been afraid of him.

‘He was so kind,’ she was heard declaring. ‘He was better a great deal than any papa she had ever dreamed of; she hoped he would never go away again; she should be so sorry, so unhappy if he did,’ with a good deal more in the same style; for her heart was completely won, and, like her mother, her affection when once awakened knew no bounds. And if her great delight now was to be with her father, it was no less a one to him to have her with him. He made her his constant companion at all times, and both at home and abroad she was always to be seen at his side; she sat beside him when he read or wrote, carried on all her amusements as near him as possible, and insisted upon accompanying him in all his walks and rambles.

With him, too, she renewed her acquaintance with ‘Mr Arthur,’ whom, in the new interests which had lately been engrossing her, she had almost forgotten. Percy had no sooner heard from his father that his cousin was located in Atherstone, than he lost no time in seeking him out; and one day when he was setting off for a walk with May, he told her he was going to take her to pay a visit to some one who wished very much to see her. Her curiosity was excited in no small degree by this infor-

mation, and her delight when introduced again to the 'gentleman with the kind eyes' was quite as great; though she puzzled herself extremely to know why it was he never spoke to her without, as she expressed it, looking so sorry. However, he was very kind to her; quite as kind as she was sure from his eyes he would be, and she made herself very happy in his house whenever she went there. With Mrs Clarke, also, she became fast friends; visiting her in the kitchen, and under her guidance exploring the house from top to bottom, though she was puzzled to know why Mr Arthur only lived in two rooms, and what he was going to do with the others. Would he never put chairs and tables in them, and would nobody ever live there? To which questions Mrs Clarke only smiled a little grimly, though she once went so far as to admit that somebody might perhaps live there by and by; she supposed he was waiting for the young lady who would come some day.

'A young lady!' May's eyes were opened, and her ears on the alert immediately. 'Who was she? Where did she live, and what was her name?'

But of that Mrs Clarke did not profess to know much. Her name was Miss Right, of course; but where she lived was another thing. Some people said she lived in Atherstone, and others that she didn't; for her own part she knew nothing about it.

Miss Right! May was more puzzled than before; and by way of enlightening herself, applied to Arthur on the subject, and asked him to tell her who the young lady was who was one day to come and live in the rest of the house. His look of astonishment at first, and then his hearty laugh, astounded poor May; though he was grave enough afterwards.

'I don't know any Miss Right yet,' he said. 'You are the only young lady who ever comes here, so I think you must be the one Mrs Clarke means. What do you say? Will you come and live with me, and make my tea?'

Yes. May thought she should like it very much; and there was a pretty room, at the top of the house, which looked over the little strip of garden, that she thought would do for her very nicely; but then, she began to demur. She should like it certainly; she should like that little room; and she liked pouring out tea when the tea-pot wasn't too heavy, and she didn't think his was: but still—her name wasn't Right, to begin with, and—oh, how could she have forgotten it? She couldn't leave her

dear papa ; what would he do without her, and she loved him so very, very much that she couldn't go away and leave him. No, Arthur must make his own tea, and the little room at the top of the house must remain empty, for May couldn't come ; and she rushed into her father's arms as she spoke, and smothered him with her kisses.

But May's visits to St Jude's Rectory came to an end after a time. A fever was ravaging some parts of the town, and it was especially prevalent in the poor and crowded districts of which Arthur's parish chiefly consisted ; so that Dr Tennent advised his family's keeping entirely away from that quarter. May's pleasant hours, therefore, with Mr Arthur were over for a time, and it would be hard to say which of them most regretted the separation—the child who had always found so much happiness in his house, or he himself when he missed her bright face, and felt he was once more cut off from all intercourse with his old home.

'Will you come with me, Queen Mab ?' Percy said one evening, two or three weeks later. 'I am going on the Copelands road a little way ; will you come too ?'

May jumped down from the garden-seat on which she had been sitting, listening to the story which her Aunt Isabel was telling her for about the five hundredth time, of 'The Ugly Duckling ;' but a walk with her father was a superior attraction, and she picked up her hat, which was lying on the ground beside her, and slipped her hand into his in great delight.

'Won't Aunt Isabel come too ?' she said eagerly : 'she never comes with us ; don't you think she will now ?'

There was no answer ; Percy's brow clouded : but May pulled his hand.

'Won't she come ?' she repeated wistfully.

'Ask her, if you like, my child,' was the reply ; but the tone was freezingly cold, and Isabel's head, which was bent over some work, went down still lower. May seemed puzzled, and for a moment stood looking alternately at her and at her father. Then she ran back to her side.

'Will you come, Aunt Isabel ? Please do,' very coaxingly.

'No, dear, not to-day.' The words were hardly audible.

'Won't you ? You are not busy. *Do* ; please do come.'

Isabel kissed her. 'Not to-day, my darling,' she said again, and May saw that her eyes were full of tears. Once more she

looked puzzled; and after gazing at her intently for a few moments, laid her head on her lap.

'Then I will stay with you,' she said decidedly. 'I won't go either.'

But at these words Isabel roused herself. 'No, indeed, dear; that would never do: you can go without me. Run, my darling, and don't keep papa waiting; he won't like it.' For Percy had turned away, and was already at the other end of the green walk.

May looked after him. Child as she was, she saw that something was wrong, and seemed doubtful on which side her sympathies were to lie. But when her aunt, kissing her once more, told her again to go, that she had something to do, and did not mind being alone, she went; though evidently with some reluctance, and she looked back several times before she finally left the walk and joined her father.

It was a warm, bright evening, and they went into one of the meadows on the Copelands road and sat down on a bank; or rather Percy sat down, for May preferred something more active, and after trying in vain to coax old Prince into running a race with her, wandered round the field in search of flowers, with which she kept filling her hands, returning to lay them in bunches by her father's side. And he sat and watched her as she ran about in the evening sunlight, and his thoughts went back, as they so often did, to years gone by; to a summer-time, which seemed now so far away, to his cottage-home, with its white walls and trailing creepers, on the shores of the blue sea, to days of great happiness spent there, and days of great misery; and memory returned to one day in particular—one bright summer's day, just such another as the present, when the little child now his pride and happiness had first seen the light. Years had gone by since then—since he had watched the fading away of his greatest earthly treasure, and had been left to the silence and sadness of a lonely hearth. But although time had changed and softened his grief, it had not brought forgetfulness; and summer days could never come round without bringing a return of the many painful feelings with which they had once been associated.

May noticed after a time that he was graver than usual, and that, contrary to his wont when she was with him, he did not shake off his abstraction; and leaving her flowers, she stole behind him and twined her arms round his neck in her loving way. He understood the action, and it brought the smile she wanted to



see, though he did not speak. For some minutes they were both silent. His eye was fixed on the western sky, where the sun had just gone down, and he was thinking of another evening—Lisa's last on earth—when they had watched together the sunset behind the Gainsford hills. May, too, was gazing intently at that western glow, but there was no sadness in her thoughts; they were those of admiration only—admiration mixed with something like awe; for when her childish voice at length broke the silence, its usually eager tones were subdued.

'How pretty!' she said, half in a whisper, and pointing to the sky as she spoke. 'Papa,' after a long pause, 'do you think that is the way into heaven? Is that the golden floor where the angels walk?'

The childish question came strangely at that moment, and Percy could not answer at first. But after a few moments, he said quietly—

'No, dearest, that is not heaven; it's only the sunlight. Heaven is more beautiful than that.'

'More beautiful!' May paused, and looked for a long time at the glowing sky. 'I should like to go there,' she added gravely, after a silence of some minutes; and Percy started, and involuntarily drew her closer to him. In the evening light she looked so pure, so ethereal, that he could have fancied her one of the angels of which she had just spoken, and a sudden mis-giving seized him.

'Why do you want to go, my darling? I couldn't spare you. You are my little comfort, you know.'

'Am I?' May smiled, and her arms were twined more closely round him. 'I like to be that, papa! Are you sure I am?'

'Quite sure, dearest. You don't want to leave me, do you?'

'No,' emphatically. 'And I'll stay with you; I won't want to go.' And she kissed him in her eager way; though after a time her eye again went back to the evening sky, and she stood still looking at it with a long, wistful gaze.

'What is it, my child? what are you thinking of?' Percy asked at last, hardly liking to see that look, and wishing to bring her back to her usual self. The answer was unexpected.

'I was thinking of mamma. She is there, isn't she?'

Percy's face grew pale. It was the first time he had ever heard her mention her mother, and for a moment it was more than he could bear; he seemed to shrink into himself as if in

pain. But her own child! surely she had a right to speak of her! Had not Lisa herself asked that they would talk of her sometimes—that she might not be forgotten? And the cold, proud look of forced calmness with which he always heard from others the most distant allusion to his lost wife, and which even then had crossed his countenance, passed away again.

'Yes, dearest, she is there. You know about her then, May?' he said, after a long silence. 'You think of her sometimes?'

'Yes, very often. Aunt Mary tells me about her. Papa, I wish she was here now. I wish she could come back to us!'

Percy was silent; a long weary sigh was his only answer. For that wish was but an echo of the wild though never-uttered yearning of his own heart; but it sounded strange to him to hear it from another, even though that other were Lisa's child. He was silent so long that May was afraid she had said something wrong, and he was roused presently by a renewal of her clinging caresses. He looked up then.

'Ah, my little May, I was forgetting you,' he said, rather sadly; and after a pause he added, with manifest effort, 'You wish she were here again? So do I, dearest; you little know, my child, what you have lost in her.' He drew a small case from his pocket as he spoke—a case which might have held a miniature likeness, but there was nothing of the sort within it. When with some hesitation he opened it, there were only a few withered blades of grass there, and a little bit of silver paper containing one long tress of golden hair. He had never had a likeness of Lisa; no photograph would have pleased him, and the only opportunity that had once offered for having a good oil-painting taken had been lost through some dislike of hers to sitting so long. He had nothing but the memory of her left; and deeply he regretted that it was so—that no picture could ever tell his child of the mother she had lost. But that long tress of hair was cherished as a sacred thing.

'See, May,' he said. 'That is her hair, it is very like yours.'

Yes, so it was. When he put them together, mother's and child's, he could hardly have told them apart; both were of the same shade of pale brown, both had the same tinge of sunlight—the sunlight that comes from western skies—upon them. For a long time May looked at that lock, and then she said softly—

'It's just like the hair in Aunt Isabel's picture, isn't it?'

'In your Aunt Isabel's picture! What do you mean, dearest?' he said absently.

'In that picture she has of mamma. Her hair is just like that,' May said, gazing intently at the golden tress before her.

'Your Aunt Isabel! No, dearest, you are mistaken. She has no likeness of your mother,' with a sigh. 'No one has.'

May raised her head, and looked at him for a moment. 'Yes,' she has: I've seen it. I saw it one day, and she told me it was mamma. She did, indeed; I really saw it,' with great earnestness.

'Saw it? where, my darling?'

'In her room. I saw it there one day, and I asked her who it was, and she told me. Oh yes, I know she has it,' May persisted. 'I saw her put it in a drawer and lock it up. I'm sure it's quite safe there.'

Percy was silent. The child seemed so positive of the truth of her assertion that he could hardly doubt it. But yet how had Isabel become possessed of the likeness; and why should she care to keep it? Lisa had been nothing to her; she had only slighted and wronged her when living, and why should she wish to retain any recollection of her?

'I think,' May began again, pursuing her own train of thought, 'I think Aunt Isabel must have painted it herself; she paints so beautifully, papa! Do you know her room is full of pictures? You've never seen them, have you?'

'Not lately. I saw them a long time ago.'

'Oh, but she has a great many now. I wish you would come and see them some day; will you? And I'll ask her to show you *that* one, shall I?' very eagerly, but lowering her voice to a whisper.

'No, dearest, no,' was the hasty answer; though he added kindly, 'I think it is some mistake of yours, my little girl.' And then, as if wishing to change the subject, he said gravely, 'I hope you don't often go to your aunt's room; she does not like to be interrupted; I am afraid you must be in the way.'

A suggestion at which May looked at first rather bewildered; though her doubts, whatever they might be, seemed to arise not so much from the words themselves as from the tone in which they were spoken. For a minute she gazed at him in evident surprise.

'I don't think I'm in the way,' she said, after some thought.

'No, I'm sure I'm not, Aunt Isabel likes me to go. She is always very kind to me, you know.'

'Is she?' There was a world of doubt and bitter irony in his voice; and although May did not comprehend him, she felt that from some cause he was displeased, and she was silent; her face growing so distressed in its expression of mute perplexity that Percy felt some reproach as he looked at her. He drew her fondly towards him.

'We have sat here long enough, my little May blossom,' he said with a smile. 'Suppose we go; it is getting late for you,' and he pointed to the sky from which the last traces of the sun's glow were fast fading away.

May jumped up, but she did not say anything, and as they went home together along the dusty road, she was far more silent than usual. She was silent also when she met her aunt again, watching her with curious wistful looks which Isabel was puzzled to account for, though they were explained later. That night when she was in her own room preparing for rest, she was startled by hearing a little voice proceeding from May's bed. She went round to see what was the matter.

'I want to ask you something,' was the answer to her inquiries. 'Aunt Isabel,' as her aunt knelt by her side, 'Aunt Isabel, papa is your brother, isn't he?'

The question was rather startling, for Isabel perceived the drift of it. 'No, dear, not my own brother,' she said with some hesitation. 'But May, you ought to be asleep now.'

'Yes; but won't you tell me first? He isn't your own brother? Why not?'

Isabel explained.

May pondered a little, as if some idea had struck her. 'Then brothers and sisters that are not "own" don't love each other?' she said.

'Not always, dear.' The answer was very low.

'But you love him, Aunt Isabel, don't you? You told me you did.'

'Yes, dear, so I do; very, very much.'

'And doesn't he love you!'

There was no answer. Isabel's face was hidden. For a long time she knelt there in silence, and then she was roused by a little head laid on her shoulder.

'I love you, Aunt Isabel! I shall always love you—always!'

## CHAPTER XLIX.

‘FROM OUT THE CLOUDS THE MOTHER LOOKS.’

‘MAY, my darling, you seem very tired,’ Percy remarked on the following evening, as he stood watching his little girl, who was hanging listlessly over the back of a garden-chair, looking pale and heavy-eyed. ‘Don’t you feel well, my child?’

‘Yes.’ But she did not move; she still stood resting her head upon the chair, and swinging one foot backwards and forwards, as if she found greater amusement in such an occupation, than in the games of which in general she was so fond.

‘I daresay she is tired,’ Elinor said, looking up from the book she was reading. ‘She has been running about all afternoon. Don’t you think you had better go to bed, May dear?’

But at this proposition May woke into life. She wasn’t tired; she didn’t want to go to bed.’ And she vanished with Prince, her voice being heard presently in ringing laughter at the other end of the garden. But she came back after a time with a flushed face and weary look.

‘I’ll go to bed now, Aunt Nelly,’ she said quietly, ‘I’m *very* tired. Will you take me, please?’

A request with which Elinor would readily have complied, but Percy forestalled her. He lifted May in his arms, and carried her off to the nursery, though he told her smilingly as they went up stairs, that he thought she was getting too old now to be carried in that way. She did not resent the assertion as she usually did with a whole string of noisy negatives; she seemed too tired for talking, and the huggings and kissings with which she always parted from him were dispensed with this evening. Making her over to her nurse’s care, Percy returned to the garden to pace up and down the green walk, as he often did at that hour, and the night being very warm, he remained there till long after it was dark. It was nearly ten o’clock when he returned to the house, and on going into the drawing-room he found only Isabel and Elinor there; the former reading, the latter seated at the tea-table.

‘Papa is out,’ Elinor said in answer to his inquiries for the

others. ‘He hasn’t been home since dinner, and mamma and Susan are gone to the Merediths’; there’s a dance there this evening, you know. It’s a pity you missed seeing Susan before she went,’ she added with a smile. ‘She looked so pretty.’

Percy smiled too. ‘She won’t make herself unhappy at having missed my admiration, I daresay,’ drawing a chair to the table as he spoke, and taking the cup of tea his sister handed to him. ‘George Meredith is at home now, isn’t he?’

‘To be sure he is. This dance is given in his honour. Mamma didn’t mean to go at first; but he made such a fuss, and Susan was so disappointed, that she gave in afterwards. George is a very nice fellow,’ added Elinor musingly.

‘You wouldn’t mind him for a brother-in-law,’ Percy said, quietly.

‘Not at all. And as I feel sure we shall have him some day, it is as well I shouldn’t mind it. But I shall like it very much, and so will mamma; it will please her exceedingly. Ah! there is papa.’

She made haste to replenish the teapot and place a chair for her father, who came in looking tired, and, a most unusual thing for him, out of spirits. He was silent and thoughtful, and Elinor remarked it as she gave him his tea.

‘Is anything the matter, papa?’ she asked, as she set down his cup by his side.

He smiled then. ‘With me? No, Nelly.’ But he looked grave again as he added a moment after, ‘Those little Bakers are both dead.’

‘Both!’

‘Yes, both; one this morning, and the other an hour ago. You have not been in any of those back streets lately, I suppose?’

He was speaking to his daughter, but his eye had turned to Percy, and Elinor knew of whom he was thinking.

‘Oh, no,’ she said, hastily. ‘We have always walked the other way since you told us they had the fever so much there. No one has ever been in that direction.’

‘That’s right. I have been speaking to Mr Rivers to-day about breaking up the schools for the present. Such numbers come from that neighbourhood, and the parents are so foolish,’ said the doctor, waxing wrathful. ‘They think nothing of sending children from houses where they know they have the fever.’

Actually, there were three of the Lofts at the school yesterday, while the youngest was in bed with it; and to-day they have all got it. I gave Mrs Loft a regular blowing-up this afternoon; not that that would do much good considering the mischief was done.'

'Mrs Loft! You don't mean to say they have it there!' It was Isabel who spoke now, and who looked very pale.

'Yes, Mrs Loft. What about her? You have not been there, surely?'

'No, oh no! Only'—— her voice trembled. 'We met little Emma yesterday, May and I, close to this door, and we stopped to speak to her. I quite forgot at the time they lived in Hammond Place; and May wanted to see something she had, so we'——

But here Isabel stopped short. She had with difficulty got as far as that, and something in her brother's face then made her break down altogether. Dr Tennent glanced at him uneasily; but his daughter's distress was too evident to allow him to blame her.

'It was a pity,' he said. 'But we'll hope there is no harm done. It was in the open air, and you were not long with the child, I suppose?'

She hesitated. 'Not very long, but some little time; five minutes, perhaps.'

Dr Tennent was silent; but Percy pushed back his chair and rose abruptly.

'My poor little May! Mary would have taken more care of her;' he said bitterly; and he took several turns across the room, while Isabel was struggling with her tears.

'You are unjust there, Percy,' remarked his father gravely; 'no one can be more careful of May than Isabel. The child herself would be the first to tell you so if you were to ask her.'

Percy made no reply. He continued his walk for some minutes in silence and then left the room; and when Dr Tennent followed him shortly afterwards, he found as he expected that he had gone to his sister's room, and was standing beside May's little bed. She was sleeping very quietly, but her father pointed uneasily to a bright spot on her cheek. It was only the side, however, on which she had been lying; and Dr Tennent smiled a little as he felt her hand.

'Not much the matter with her at present,' he said; 'but we

shall see how she is to-morrow. If you are at all afraid for her, we can send her off to Copelands.’

‘Yes; that was what I had been thinking. She shall go certainly. I will take her over myself the first thing in the morning, and she shall stay there for the present. I can’t afford to run any risks with her. My little May, my own precious child!’

Alone in her room that night, poor Isabel knelt by May’s side, and prayed with many bitter tears that the life of her brother’s child might not have been endangered through her carelessness; that she might be spared the misery of knowing she had brought another heavy trial on him, and made his lonely life yet more lonely. Her prayer was not answered in the way she hoped; and for long she thought it had not been heard at all.

She slept little that night, being kept awake by the heat and her own uneasiness. She fancied, too, that the child seemed restless; and once or twice she heard her moaning and muttering in her sleep. It was not until daylight was almost dawning that anything like sound slumber came to her. But it did not last long; she had not been sleeping half an hour when she was roused by a scream. May was sitting up in bed, trembling with fright.

‘Take it away, Aunt Isabel; take it way!’ she exclaimed, and she clung to her imploringly.

‘What is it, dearest? There is nothing here. What are you afraid of?’

‘A cat—a black cat! Take it away!’ May muttered.

‘A cat! No, my pet; there isn’t. And if there were, you are not afraid of cats?’ And Isabel tried to laugh. ‘But you were only dreaming.’

‘Was I?’ May shivered, but her hands were burning, and even in the faint light of the early dawn, Isabel could see that her face was unnaturally flushed. She was frightened herself then. Rising hastily, she hurried on her clothes, and went to call her father. He was not long in answering her summons, but the first glance she took at his countenance as he stood by the side of the child brought her no comfort; it told her at once her fears were only too well founded. Yes, May was ill; and it was her doing. Her prayer of the night before was not to be answered—her sin of long ago prevented that, she thought. She looked so wretched that her father’s pity was aroused.

‘You must not make yourself unhappy, Isabel,’ he said



kindly. 'She might have had it just the same if you had never met that child.'

Isabel was silent, but it was not because the words brought much consolation—they were scarcely heeded, indeed; for the conviction that May's illness was the result of her own carelessness was too strong for any attempts at comfort to reach her. She was thinking of her brother—thinking how she could bear his reproaches, and the sight of his misery.

'We shall have to send the others off,' Dr Tennent said. 'We must get them out of the way of infection at once. But you—Will you be afraid to stay, do you think?'

'Afraid! I am not much of a nurse, you know; but'—her voice trembled. 'I will do my best—indeed I will.'

'I am sure of that, my dear; and you will have Lane to help you. And now I must see about sending the others off. They must go to Copelands for the present.'

A great deal of stir and bustle there was at the Priory that morning, but not much of it reached Isabel's room. May awoke to headache and fever, and every moan and restless movement of hers went to her aunt's heart as she sat by her side, calm outwardly, but striving in vain to still the tumult of feelings within—feelings which increased tenfold in their bitterness when her brother came to stand beside his child. It was true he said nothing—she had not to bear the reproaches she had feared; but she would almost sooner have had them than have seen the look with which he bent over his little May as she lay with her eyes closed, her lips parched, and her cheek bright with the flush of fever.

'My poor little girl!' he said tenderly, and at the sound of his voice she stopped her uneasy moaning and looked up.

'Dear papa!' she exclaimed in her usual tone; but a moment after the fretful little voice began again.

'O Aunt Isabel, my head aches! I'm so tired and so thirsty—mayn't I have something to drink?'

A strange sad day that was. When Mrs Tennent, with the rest of the party, had gone off to Copelands, silence settled down upon the house, and except in that one room, the place appeared deserted. The sultry heat was oppressive, but it was hardly more so within than without. The very air seemed in a blaze, the lawn and the lime-trees lay smoking in the sunlight, and the slight breeze that crept into the room, bringing with

it the many busy sounds from the town around, felt hot and stifling.

As evening came on, however, May grew less restless : she seemed to sleep at intervals, and there was hope that the fever might yield to the remedies that had been tried. She had been lying very quietly for some time in a half-dozing state, when a slight movement of Percy’s roused her, and she looked up startled ; but presently fixed her eyes upon him with a smile.

‘Papa, I had such an odd dream just then. At least not a dream exactly ; for I wasn’t asleep, because I saw you and Aunt Isabel sitting there. I was lying looking at you, when I saw some one else, too ; some one just like that picture in the drawer in your room, Aunt Isabel. She was so pretty, and she had such beautiful long hair ; you showed it me the other day, you know, papa. I knew directly it was mamma, and I wasn’t a bit afraid. She held out her hand, and she said, “Will you come with me, little May ?” And she smiled, and I thought I should like to go ; but when I was putting out my hand for her to take, I thought of you, papa. I thought you would be so sorry if I went—that you wouldn’t know what to do without me ; and I told her so. But she held out her hand still, and I think she was going to say something else, only just then you moved ; and when I looked for her again she was gone. There were only you and Aunt Isabel here alone. I was so surprised, because I was sure she was there. You didn’t see her too, did you, papa ?’

‘No, dearest.’ His voice faltered a little. ‘You were asleep, my child.’

‘Not asleep,’ May said, decidedly. ‘It was a thought ; but it was a strange one, wasn’t it ?’

‘Very ; but people have strange fancies, my darling, when they are ill.’ His tone was unnatural in its forced quietness.

May was silent for some little time ; she lay looking with very wistful eyes, first at him and then at her aunt.

‘I wonder if people go on loving in heaven ?’ she remarked, after a pause. ‘But it can’t be the same thing if they do. It wouldn’t be the same to you, papa, if I loved you there, as it is now you have me here. And it wouldn’t be the same to Aunt Isabel either. And,’ looking at him earnestly, ‘do you know I made her a promise the other day. I told her I would always love her. If I go away, I can’t keep my promise—at least she will never know whether I do or not. I should be

sorry for that, because I want her to have somebody to love her.'

She looked at him again, but he was silent.

'People always like to have somebody to love them, don't they? You do, papa?'

'I do, my little May. I like to have you, my child.' And he bent down over her, and kissed her burning forehead.

'And I suppose she does, too. She has always been so kind to me, and loved me so much, that I hope if I go away, and can't love her any more, she will have some one else to love her instead. And I think she will,' said May; and this time she turned her eyes with a smile upon her aunt.

There was a long silence. Isabel's agitation was too great for her to speak; and Percy was struggling, almost in vain, to maintain his usual proud coldness. May lay very quiet again, appearing to be once more half sleeping. But her quietness did not last long. She started up after a time, from the half doze, half stupor, in which she had been lying, and there was something so wild in her look, as her eye wandered round the room, that Percy saw at once her illness had taken a new turn. To his grief he found she did not know him.'

'Aunt Isabel!' she exclaimed, piteously. 'Aunt Isabel! Where is she? Won't she come to me?' And in vain he spoke to her, calling her by every endearing name. She turned from him. 'Not you; not you,' she said wildly. 'It's Aunt Isabel I want: tell her to come to me.' And her tones grew so pathetic in their entreaty that, reluctant as Percy was to yield his place to another, he was fain to do so when he found no words of his could recal her wandering mind, or quiet her restlessness. But when Isabel sat down by her side, and holding her hand in hers, spoke to her in the low gentle tones she had known from infancy, she was calmed at once. Calmed for the time; but the fever increased rapidly; and all that night, and for many days afterwards, the poor child lay in delirium, either moaning and muttering low to herself in her more quiet moments, or talking wildly and incoherently at others, when the fever was at its height.

But there came a day at last which Dr Tennent said must bring a crisis. Percy came into his sister's room that afternoon, and found her seated near the open window with May upon her lap. The child had been so restless in her bed—her little limbs,

wasted with illness, were so weary with lying there, that Isabel had taken her up, and she was now sitting wrapped in a shawl on her aunt's knee, with her head upon her shoulder; her burning cheek, labouring breath, and uneasy moaning, telling a sad tale of fever and suffering. She turned her head when her father came up, and looked at him for a moment, but it was with a vacant gaze; she did not know him, and began once more the low wailing cry which was all she seemed now to have strength for, but which was more wearing to those about her than her former incoherent ramblings and delirious ravings had been. Poor Isabel had heard it incessantly for so many days, that she looked as if she were worn out with the sound; but her voice, when she spoke, was as gentle as ever; and her face, as she bent over the suffering child, though sad and pale, was very loving. Percy's eye lingered on her that afternoon almost as often as on his child; and there was a strange look now and then on his face, as he listened to her speaking in low soothing tones to May, and saw the child nestle closer to her in her confiding way, as if she were in her mother's arms.

It grew dark sooner than usual that evening; for there was a heavy bank of clouds in the west, and all the sky looked stormy. And after the sun had gone down, the wind began to be heard; coming at first with a low creeping sound, stirring the tops of the lime-trees, brushing the vine-leaves that grew over the windows, and stealing cool and fresh into that fevered room. But it grew stronger by degrees, and soon all the boughs of the garden-trees were creaking and groaning as it passed, and its shrill blast roused little May to recommence the moaning which for a time she had ceased.

But that weary sound was not to go on now for very long. Isabel was soon aware that it was once more ceasing; and that with it too were ceasing the child's restless movements. There was a silence so still and deep that she was afraid to move—afraid to look lest she should see she knew not what—but something that would tell her May was passing away. Had the end indeed come so soon? Was Lisa really there to fetch her child?

But while she was sitting motionless with that great fear weighing her down, her father entered the room, and came up to the back of her chair. He bent over the child and looked at her for some moments.

'Can't you lay her down?' he said in a low voice. 'She is asleep now, and may sleep for hours.'

'Asleep!' Isabel's long-drawn sigh was one of the most intense thankfulness.

'Yes, the fever has turned,' Dr Tennent said; 'but she must have this sleep out. And I want you to have some rest too. You need it sadly; can't you lay her down without disturbing her?'

But that was impossible; for when Isabel tried to raise the little head from her shoulder, May moved uneasily, and half roused herself.

'She had better stay where she is,' she said. 'Never mind me. I can rest afterwards.'

And once more she drew the little sleeper to her, and resumed her former position. She was very weary, and her limbs felt cramped and stiff; but it could hardly have been with the weight of her burden, for May, never very heavy, was light enough now. She was little more than skin and bone, and her tiny feet and ankles peeping from beneath her nightdress looked hardly more than those of a baby. Her face too was shrunk, and appeared even smaller than it really was, from having lost all the long curls that had always hung about it. But it was a very sweet face still; and as Isabel looked at it, it was such relief to see it at rest again—to see the heavy eyes closed in quiet sleep, instead of meeting only their wandering glances, that she could not think of her own fatigue. She could only sit, conscious of nothing exactly; and how that long night passed she never knew. She knew there was a storm—that the rain came down in torrents in the lulls of the wind, and she saw the flash of the lightning and heard the heavy roll of the thunder, but it sounded far off and indistinct, and she felt as if what she saw and heard were no realities. In the same way too she knew that her brother, who could not bear to leave his child, was in the room all the night watching with her; and she knew also that Lane came in at times—that she closed the window once because the air was growing damp, and that another time she brought a second shawl to throw over May and herself. That must have been near morning surely, for the night had been so very long; but yet there were no signs of daylight. The lamp on the table burned bright and clear, and through the door, which had been left

open, she could see that the passage beyond was still dark. Very dark it looked—dark and shadowy; and somehow, in the dreamy state in which she then was, she began to fill it with shadowy forms. Not of imaginary beings, but of those who had once really gone up and down it. She saw them all, not as they were now—some changed, some gone, and those who remained burdened with the cares of life; but she saw them as they had been, a joyous light-hearted band; she heard their footsteps passing to and fro; she listened to their voices and to the echo of their laugh and song. That dark passage was peopled with the ghosts of her earlier years, and very blissful was the dream in which she sat; for she thought the days she so bitterly regretted were not yet gone—that the time she would so gladly have recalled had not yet faded into the irrevocable past. Kind words, kind looks, kind thoughts were still in her power; there was work for others to be done, and there were the hours still before her to do it in. And more than all, those whom she loved and mourned, those whom she had wronged and slighted and harshly judged, were there—she was listening to their words, and she saw them passing by her, young and blithe and beautiful, with no shadow of death or change upon their brow.

But that dream could not last; she was recalled from those visions of the past.

‘Drink it, Miss Isabel,’ she heard Lane saying; and she came back from the world of fancies to find the old nurse by her side with a cup of hot coffee in her hand. ‘Drink it, Miss Isabel, there’s a dear! You want it, for you look dreadfully ill.’

‘Yes, drink it, Isabel. I am sure you want it,’ said another voice; and how strange that voice sounded! She had not heard it for years! Was it really her brother who was speaking? Was she back in those old times of which she had been thinking? No; for May was on her arm, and the night-light burned on the table before her. She remembered where she was, but felt confused still; and not only confused, but, as Lane had said, she looked ill—so ill that eating and drinking were things impossible; and she turned from the cup which was held to her as if it were a poisoned draught.

‘I can’t drink it,’ she said. ‘Let me alone till afterwards. I shall do better as I am.’

So they let her alone—and that was the last she seemed to know of that night. Slowly as its hours crept by, they did go

at length ; darkness changed to greyness, and then the grey light of early morning gave place to the full glory of the day.

The chimes of the old Priory Church were ringing out the hour of eight when May awoke—the flush of fever gone from her face, the light of reason returned to her eye. She knew her father as he knelt by her side, though when she tried to raise her hand to lift it to his, it fell again from weakness, and her head drooped once more on the shoulder upon which it had been resting. But Lane stood ready with the jelly which had been provided, and some spoonfuls of that revived her ; and then she looked up again, this time to greet him with a smile.

‘ You know me, my child, my little May, don’t you ? ’ he said, feeling as if his happiness were too great to last.

‘ Yes, ’ her large eyes expressing some surprise—perhaps she wondered to see him kneeling there, and to find herself in her aunt’s arms instead of in her own bed. But she was too weak to give utterance to her astonishment in words, and Lane, who had watched the effects of those few spoonfuls of nourishment with much satisfaction, had hardly time to administer three or four more before she was asleep again—sleeping so soundly that there seemed but little fear of disturbing her.

‘ And that is what you must do, Miss Isabel, ’ Lane said, taking the child from her arms. ‘ She will do now ; I will look after her, and you must just go and lie down. And if you take my advice, you ’ll go to Miss Mary’s room, where you can be quiet and have your rest out. You want it, if anybody ever did, for you look like a ghost. ’

But Isabel’s strength was gone now ; the call for exertion was over, and with it went all that had kept her up. Weary and ill as she was, there had just been consciousness enough left to realise that May was safe, consciousness enough to send up her whole soul in thanksgiving that so much more had been granted than she had dared to hope ; and now at last she gave way. The floor seemed to totter beneath her feet, strange figures danced round her for a moment, and then darkness came over her. Sense and power failed her at once, and she fell back in the chair in which she had been sitting, and fainted away.

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## CHAPTER L.

## 'THE BURDEN HAS FALLEN FROM ME.'

It was many a long day after that before Isabel awoke again to consciousness. Dreary hours of weakness and delirium followed that fortnight's watching, and the suspense of that last terrible night. The strain upon mind and body had been too great for her easily to shake off its effects, and when she succumbed to the fever which had well-nigh carried off little May, she seemed to have no strength to struggle with it. She lay for long in a state of such extreme danger that but the faintest hopes were entertained of her recovery, and even when the worst symptoms at length passed away, her state of utter prostration was such that for many days there appeared no chance of her rallying from the weakness left by illness and anxiety. It was some weeks, indeed, after her first seizure before any real signs of amendment began to show themselves, or she seemed to be aware of what was passing about her. When she did once more awake to full consciousness, it was to find herself, on a summer's afternoon, lying in a quiet shaded room, with Mary sitting by her side. She looked at her sister in surprise.

'You here, Mary!'

'Yes.' Mary's smile was the same as ever, just as bright, just as pleasant; there was little change in her indeed in any way; six years did not seem to have added a line to her face or cast a shadow upon the cheerfulness of her spirit.

'Didn't you know I was here then?' she said. 'You have often talked to me; I thought perhaps you knew me.'

'No,' Isabel lay back again. 'At least I don't seem to remember anything about it. I fancied every one was here at times,' with a long sigh. 'How long have you been here, Mary, and where is May? Is she well yet—what is she doing?'

'She is much better,' Mary said. 'Percy has taken her to Firsby for change and sea-air.'

'Better, really better!' Isabel murmured. 'Mary, are you sure?' And she caught her sister's hand.

'Quite sure, dear. I wouldn't tell you anything that was not



true. He says she is looking almost herself again. He writes very happily about her.'

'Does he? Ah! I shall see her again, then, my dear little May! And perhaps,' her tone was lowered as if she were speaking to herself, 'perhaps he may forgive me—perhaps he may not blame me so much now.' And tears which she was too weak to restrain rolled slowly down her thin wasted cheek.

'He won't blame you for anything, dear Isabel,' Mary said tenderly. 'We all know what you have done for May, and Percy won't be the one to think least of it, you may be quite sure. But you are talking too much now, and you are not to speak another word till you have had something to eat. Papa won't be at all pleased if he finds you have been over-exerting yourself.'

Isabel's recovery was very slow. She had not the buoyancy of spirits which enables some so soon to throw off illness, and she was long in regaining even a slight degree of the strength which had been so severely tasked. But she did at length recover sufficiently for her father to pronounce her strong enough to bear the journey to Firsby; and, as all fear of infection was then over, no time was lost in setting out. The morning after permission had been given them to go, she and Mary started for their destination.

There was no one at home when they arrived; the mistress of the house was the only person there to receive them: Colonel Tennent was out riding with his little girl, she said; and even Lane was away—she had gone into the town to do some shopping. Everything that was necessary, however, was soon done for them, and after a sort of luncheon-dinner, Isabel's sofa was drawn up to a window that overlooked the sea, and she was left to her own meditations, while Mary went away to see to some unpacking.

It was not long she had to lie there alone. From the cushions among which she was resting, she had been watching the sunny unruffled line of waters before her, and the long procession of people walking and driving on the road in front of the house, when the clatter of horses' hoofs coming up at a canter and stopping at the door made her raise herself and look out eagerly. Yes, there they were; there was her brother, and there by his side was May, her little May, no longer pale and wasted with illness, but beautiful and blooming with health and exercise; her

hair, short still, it was true, but regaining something of its former wave, and now blown about her face—the colour in her cheek, and her eyes bright and dancing. Not that Isabel saw all this in her first glance, for May was talking fast and eagerly to her father, and her head was turned another way while she pointed out over the sea. But the landlady came out to meet them, and tell, as it seemed, of the arrival in their absence, and then they both looked up—Percy too near-sighted to make out his sister at the window ; but May's eyes were much quicker.

'Yes, there she is—she's really there !' Isabel heard her exclaim. 'O papa, take me down—quick—this minute, please.' And hardly waiting for him to come round, she slipped to the ground.

Such a tiny dot she looked as she stood there ; and in her haste to fly into the house she set her foot on her habit, and would have fallen had not her father caught her. He saved her just in time, and picking her up, carried her to the top of the stairs, and putting her down there, opened the drawing-room door. With a cry of joy May rushed forward, and flinging herself on the sofa, well-nigh smothered her aunt in her eager embrace.

'You dear Aunt Isabel ! I'm so glad—so happy ! Only you're so thin, and look so—— Oh, but I'm so glad—— And it will be so nice now you are here ! I'm very happy,' and then she half smothered her again with her kisses.

'Yes, that's right, my little May,' Percy said. 'You can never love her too much, or thank her half enough for what she has done for you. No more can I—but you will know what we feel, Isabel, won't you ? You won't think us ungrateful ?'

Isabel looked up, but she could see nothing distinctly—there was a mist before her eyes. But she felt May's clinging caresses, and the child's soft cheek lying on hers ; and that seemed to bring the conviction that it was in no dream she had heard those words.

'O Percy ! have you—can you have forgiven me ?' she exclaimed, and she burst into tears.

Percy's answer was to stoop down, and his kiss for the first time for many years was once more that of a brother.

'Can you forgive me ?' he said. 'I believe I have judged you very harshly, Isabel, lately ; but I didn't know till May was ill that'——

‘That I was changed—that I think very differently now from what I once did. But it was my own fault, Percy. I ought to have told you so long ago. I ought to have told you years ago how bitterly I repented my unkindness to—to—— *She* forgave me, but I was afraid to ask you, for I thought you never could.’ She looked at him through her tears.

‘What! not after what you have done for her child? No, Isabel, whatever I may once have thought of you, I should be most ungrateful now if I could forget all you have done for my little May—for her child, as well as mine. If you once wronged one who was very dear to me, and whom, God knows, I was perhaps too much wrapped up in, you have saved another almost as dear. Isabel, will you let us forget the past, and be to each other again what we used to be?’

‘O Percy!’ she exclaimed. ‘It is you who have to forget as well as forgive; but if you could only believe how I have grieved for all the unkind and jealous thoughts I once had! I have never been happy since; but if you can really forgive me’——

‘If!’ Isabel, you cannot doubt it.’ He stooped down once more, and this time there was no hesitation—no misgiving in his sister’s warm passionate embrace. All the long pent-up affection of years found vent then, and in it was buried by both all recollection of former wrongs and misunderstandings.

And so over Lisa’s little child ‘those twain, long severed, were reconciled.’

They were long pleasant days that followed—days of returning health to Isabel, days of returning happiness in her brother’s regained affection. Days of returning happiness also to Percy—happiness greater than he had known for years; for the healing of that long-standing breach between himself and his sister had brought him peace, and his little girl was once more making the sunshine of his life. And May, no longer puzzled and pained by coldness between those she loved best, was in a state of perpetual joyousness, her young voice and merry laughter making music all day long.

‘A piece of news!’ said Mary, producing a letter one morning at the breakfast-table. ‘And very pleasant news, too! Can anybody guess what it is?’

‘A wedding in prospective, I suppose,’ remarked Isabel. ‘You always look particularly delighted when you fancy two people are going to be happy for life. Who is it, though? Rose Dacre?’

‘Rose Dacre! No; what made you think of her? Somebody much nearer.’

‘Somebody much nearer! What! Not Susan!’ and as her sister nodded—‘Susan and George Meredith! Well, I had no idea it would come to anything so soon!’

‘So soon! Why, had you any idea of it at all? I am sure I hadn’t. If anybody had asked me to guess, I don’t believe I should ever have thought of them; certainly not of George.’

There was a laugh and an exclamation at this from both her brother and sister.

‘They can’t be married yet, though,’ Mary added. ‘They will have to wait another year, for he has not finished at college. But that is not of much consequence, for he is almost as young as she is. He isn’t one-and-twenty, is he? And he looks such a boy. Nelly says papa and mamma are both very much pleased; mamma particularly. There’s the letter, Isabel; you’ll like to see it.’

Isabel took the letter, and while she was reading it Mary turned to her brother.

‘Poor Nelly! She writes in such good spirits about Susan, and seems so happy for her! It is a great pity she is not going to be as happy herself. Really she and Arthur ought to marry now! After waiting for him all these years, and bearing everything so well as she has done, it ought to be a match at last.’

‘So it ought,’ Percy said decidedly. ‘And so it will too. Mrs Tennent must give in sooner or later, for there is no reason to keep them apart any longer. Arthur is in a position to marry, and she must know by this time how honourably he has behaved ever since he has been in Atherstone. He has been kept out of the Priory quite long enough in my father’s opinion.’

One evening, not many days after that, Elinor was sitting alone in the library at the Priory, busily occupied in the fading light with some household work. The family were hardly settled again in the old house, which had undergone a thorough cleansing and purifying process since the fever; and many small domestic arrangements and alterations, which Mrs Tennent had seen fit to make after their return, had not been completed. A pile of curtains on which she was sewing new fringe was engaging Elinor’s attention, and in the dusk she was still stitching away, hoping to finish her work while there was sufficient light to see where her needle went, when a knock at the door disturbed her.

'Come in,' she said ; and the door was opened, but she did not raise her head ; for had she taken her eyes from her work she would not have been able to see it again, and there was not a quarter of a yard more to do. But, after a moment's pause, she was surprised there was no further movement, and that no one spoke.

'Who is it ?' she asked. 'I'll come in one minute, but I'm just finishing this. Is it you, Susan ?'

'No, Elinor.'

The voice was strangely familiar to her, and yet sadly strange ; and she started up and looked round. Dusk as it was, there was no mistaking that figure in the doorway. And back flashed upon her mind the scene in the dining-room at Lassell Lodge, and a dismayed group gathered round a pale senseless form there. She seemed to see them all again—to see her brother's dark stern face and her sister's indignant looks, and to hear once more her own wild incoherent confession. She could not speak now : she could only stand and look ; for although her lips moved several times, no sound came.

'You have forgotten me then, Nelly ? You did not wish to see me again.'

'Forgotten you !' she found voice then. 'O Arthur !' But as he came across the room she drew back. He understood the movement.

'I am not here without being asked,' he said a little proudly. 'I might have met you a hundred times before this, Nelly, if I had liked ; but I would not. I knew it was your wish as well as mine that we should not meet again till we could do so fairly and openly ; and I made up my mind when I first came to Atherstone that I would never try to see you. It is with Mrs Tenent's knowledge I am here now. I have just been with her, and she told me you were here—she sent me to you.'

'She sent you ? Mamma ?' Elinor's bewilderment was almost too great for words.

'Yes ; at least she told me I should find you here. I suppose she meant me to come,' and Arthur smiled a little. 'I met my uncle in the street not half an hour ago, and he asked me to walk back with him ; he said she wanted to see me. For a second, Nelly, I was going to be proud. You wouldn't believe it, would you ? But she had set her face against me for so long, that for one moment I thought I would say "no," and keep away

altogether ; but then I remembered you, Nelly ; and I remembered other things too. And so—— well, I had no right to be proud, you see ; so here I am.' And the shrug of the shoulders with which the words were accompanied was so like the Arthur of old days that, while Elinor smiled, the tears stood in her eyes.

'But I don't understand,' she said. 'What did she say to you?'

'Lots,' he answered, purposely mistaking her meaning. 'Not so much as I expected. But she had her say, and I made my apologies. I could do that with a good grace, Nelly, for I'd have done it long ago if she would have let me. I told her I knew I had behaved very badly, and had regretted it for years. She did not say much after that ; she was very gracious, all things considered. Certainly, I have no right to complain of my reception, for it was far better than I ever looked for,' he added, as he stood watching his cousin's face in the waning light.

Elinor was silent for some moments. 'It must have been Percy's doing,' she said at last. 'Yes, I know it now.'

She stood and gazed at Arthur, as if it were no reality she saw there—only some vision that would vanish if she spoke or moved. But his voice recalled her to herself.

'You look even now as if you scarcely knew me,' he said—'as if you had forgotten me, and thought I was a stranger. But, Elinor, you must guess what I have come for.'

She gazed at him still, and the colour rushed into her face ; but she did not speak.

'You gave me your promise years ago, Nelly. You said when I had a home you would share it with me. I had no right then to ask such a thing of you ; but it is different now. I have leave to ask you, and I have a home to give you. Will you keep your promise?'

Elinor was silent for a moment ; but it was only because she found no voice to speak—great happiness seemed at first to choke her utterance ; but, as he looked at her anxiously, she held out her hand.

'I have not changed, Arthur ; you are just the same to me that you ever were, and my promise is the same. If I could not have kept it to you, I should never have made it to any one else.'

'Ah, Nelly, I knew I could trust you !' he exclaimed, as he caught the hand she held out to him ; and surely neither he nor Elinor could have known afterwards what they were doing, for

they never discovered that for more than an hour they were sitting together upon the heap of curtains which had been thrown on the sofa when he entered, and which were reduced to anything but a presentable state in consequence of this little oversight.

‘And really,’ said Mrs Tennent, when she came to inspect them a little later, ‘I think you might have taken the trouble to do your work more tidily, Elinor. You will never make a good housewife if you don’t think it worth while to be as neat and orderly with old work as with new. And as it is my opinion that you will have more of the first than the last in hand, you had better learn to practise carefulness in time. You will never have money to throw away, you may be sure of that.’

‘For she has made up her mind to have Arthur,’ she said afterwards to her husband. ‘I knew how it would be directly they got together again. It is very foolish of her, but I can’t help it. She must have her own way, I suppose. So much better though as she might have done if she liked!’

‘I don’t know that,’ returned the doctor. ‘I have a very high opinion of Arthur now, and shall give her to him with a great deal of pleasure. She might have been a little richer, perhaps, if she had married any one else, but I doubt if she would have been happier. I am very well satisfied, Helen—very well satisfied indeed.’

‘Of course you are, Dr Tennent; you are satisfied with everything. If your daughters went off to Gretna Green, or settled down in a hovel, you would be quite satisfied, so that they were with somebody they had taken a fancy to. But that is not my way; and I am thankful that Susan has shown herself a little wiser. As for Elinor, she must do as she likes. I believe she would never have married at all if she couldn’t have had Arthur; so perhaps things are best as they are. But it is very well now to fancy she is going to be happy when there is only herself and him to think of, but it will be different when there come to be a dozen children to be fed and clothed, and appearances to be kept up too. And she will have an immense family, of course: the poorer people are, the more children they have—it is an invariable rule.’

‘Well, I believe it often is the case. It is a merciful arrangement,’ said the doctor. ‘When blessings don’t come in one shape, they do in another; and children are a great blessing.’

‘And a great anxiety,’ said Mrs Tennent sharply.

'Yes, sometimes ; but then one expects anxiety in this world, and it is well to have some happiness with it. And children somehow do bring a great deal of happiness, though they bring trouble too.'

The doctor was in that frame of mind that it was useless to argue with him ; his wife therefore left him to entertain his own delusions, and settled herself to meditate upon her daughter Susan's prospects, which in one way were decidedly more promising than Elinor's, and bid fair to realise all she had once hoped for each of her children.

But Elinor was very happy ; she never once thought of envying her younger sister the more brilliant future that was in store for her. It was too great happiness to be with Arthur again, to know that her engagement was an open and honourable one, sanctioned by her parents, and approved by all whom she most cared for ; and in looking forward to future years to be spent with him to whom her affections had so long been given, she felt as if there were little else to wish for. Both she and Arthur thought their present happiness more than they deserved ; and perhaps neither felt this more than one day when he was speaking of his last parting with Lisa, which had made such an impression upon him.

'She told me she was sure I should see you again, and that some time we should be happy together. Poor little Lisa !' he added ; 'how shamefully we treated her ! It is a good thing we don't get all our deserts in this world, or I should know I hadn't much chance of being happy with you for very long. I should feel I had no right to expect the happiness for myself which I helped to destroy for others. And we have so much more than we could ever have hoped for.'

'Yes, indeed, we have. All I want now is to see you more like yourself again, Arthur ; not looking so old and tired, as if you were working yourself to death. I don't believe you eat or drink or do anything regularly. Mrs Clarke's complaints are all true, I'm sure.'

Arthur laughed. 'Ah, I'll behave better when you come to the Rectory, Nelly. I shan't be able to rush in and out at all hours when I know you are waiting for me. I shall be obliged to sit down and eat my meals like a Christian, as the old woman says. And I'll make a holiday for myself then, Nelly. I can't afford a long one ; but we'll have two or three weeks somewhere.



And you won't keep me waiting for ages now? I can't stand a solitary life much longer; and that old house is "terrible lonesome." You will come to it soon, won't you?

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## CONCLUSION.

'BEHIND THE CLOUDS IS THE SUN STILL SHINING.'

ARTHUR and Elinor were married that autumn. There was no wish on any one's part to delay the wedding, for all felt they had waited long enough; and every one could sympathise with Arthur's desire to have his wife in his home before the months of winter set in. So when St Jude's Rectory, to May's great delight, was furnished and ready to receive the bride, one foggy day, early in November, another wedding party from the Priory met together in the old church; and at the altar, where seven years before Percy and Lisa had knelt side by side, Arthur and Elinor now knelt in their turn, and plighted their mutual vows. And Percy stood a little apart listening, with bent head and folded arms, to the words of the service he had heard read so long ago, but which seemed to bring that time so near again, that he could have fancied himself still in his cousin's place, and the little white-robed figure who had then been made his own, kneeling with him too. It was with a weary, heart-wrung sigh that when the service was over, and he raised his eyes, he missed the look which he well remembered having met on that day; and there was a most bitter pang to recollect how lonely he now was, how very far away was that time of which he had been thinking. And yet—no, was he in truth so very lonely? His glance fell upon a child's form—the youngest and the loveliest of all the party there, and he saw a pair of dark bright eyes lifted lovingly to his face, and his heart reproached him then for having even for one moment forgotten the great blessing still spared to him. And that bitter cry was stifled, and the repining thoughts were checked, and in their stead there was a hope, a prayer that the happiness of the two just made one might be more lasting than that of his own brief wedded life.

The sun came out as they were leaving the church, shining through the haze ; and, in spite of the fog which hung about, the day was mild and far from being ungenial. The wedding breakfast, too, was perhaps as cheerful an affair as such things generally are. Their numbers were large to begin with ; and if some voices among them were silent, they were hardly missed in the general hum that went on around. And if Elinor looked nervous, and Mary and Isabel were grave, there was nothing for any one to remark in what was so common at such times. Brides often do look nervous, and sisters will feel partings ; and although some few did wonder to see that Arthur also was grave—far graver than many had supposed he ever could be, they did not guess the thoughts that kept him so ; they did not know that it was the recollection of another day long since vanished, and the tones of a little motherless child which met his ear at times, that made him so silent. Far more silent than Percy, who, though grave and quiet as usual, had nothing of sadness in his face. It had been his great wish that his cousin's marriage should take place while he was still at home to be present at it ; and it was at his request that, when he found there was a chance of his almost immediately obtaining a staff appointment, the day which had been originally fixed was altered to an earlier one. There were none certainly whose wishes for Arthur's and Elinor's happiness were truer and deeper ; none whose farewell, when the hour for parting came, was warmer.

'You will have a fine journey, after all, old fellow,' he said, with a smile, as he and his cousin shook hands at the hall-door. 'And you will let us hear from you soon, won't you ? I am afraid you won't find us here when you come back ; but it won't be long before you see us again. I shall be bringing May down in the spring to pay you a visit, and see how you are getting on.'

'And what sort of a clergyman's wife I make ;' said Elinor, trying to smile through her tears. 'Mind you keep your promise, Percy, for I shall look for you then. I don't think our home will seem quite right till we have had you to stay with us.'

'You will think differently in a month's time,' he answered, lightly ; and then, changing his tone, he added, gravely, 'Your home will be a very happy one, Nelly ; a happy one for many a year to come, I hope and trust. And I can't wish more for

you,' he said firmly, 'than that you may both be as happy as Lisa and I were.'

'O Percy!' Elinor's tears were coming fast now. 'And when your home is so lonely—when we helped to make it so!'

'Never mind, Nelly; it is best for me as it is. I thought too much of her. And I am not lonely; I have my little May left,' looking at his child, who was clinging to his hand. 'She is to be everything to me. No, not everything,' correcting himself; 'I am afraid I was beginning to think too much of her too, at one time: but I have learned better now, though she must always be very dear to me. But she won't come first,' His voice faltered for a moment, and then he looked up again with a smile. 'Well, good-bye, and God bless you both.'

And so they went; but long after they were gone Percy stood at the window gazing down the street where the rays of the November sun were falling with a shaded misty light; and May knelt upon a chair by his side, and looked out too; soberly and silently at first, for the parting with her aunt had made her feel rather downcast, but her voice was heard again after a time, and its merry tone diverted her father from his thoughtful mood.

'I think being married is very nice,' she remarked in her most joyous voice. 'It's great fun; though Aunt Nelly did cry. But I've got a new uncle now, you know. Mr Arthur is my uncle; did you know that, papa? Mrs Clarke said he would be when he married Aunt Nelly; and she said, too—oh, such an odd thing!—she said Aunt Nelly was Miss Right. I don't believe that. I think it's only her make-up. But anyhow, Mr Arthur is my uncle now, and I'm very glad, for I like him very much, and he says we are to go and see him very often; and I'm to have that little room at the top of the house for my own whenever we go there. I went to see it yesterday with Aunt Mary. I wonder whether Aunt Susan will give me a pretty little room when she's married; and Aunt Isabel, too. For Aunt Isabel is going to be married, papa,' and May lowered her voice confidentially, 'Lane says so. I heard her tell Mrs Clarke one day that she was going to marry Mr Lawrence when he got something. I don't know what exactly. I don't think I shall like Aunt Isabel being married, because she'll go away too, then; and everybody seems to be going now. You are going too, papa?'

'Yes, my darling; but you are to come with me, we are going together. I shall not part with you again, my little May.'

‘No; and I’m so glad. I do like being with you, papa; and I always mean to stay with you. And Aunt Mary is coming with us. Oh, we shall be so happy, so very happy!’

She was right. In his new home, with his child and sister with him, Percy is neither lonely nor unhappy. Far otherwise, indeed, for May’s young warm affection and loving ways have filled the void once left in his heart. It is true that he still often thinks of other days, and often in fancy hears a step and a voice that have long been silent; and memory at such times will bring back the churchyard by the sounding sea, where far from her old home and kindred, his little Lisa—his ten months’ bride—is sleeping her last sleep. The thunder of the surge upon the beach in the long winter nights, and its murmurs there in the golden days of summer, can never more disturb her slumbers. Calmly she lies at rest—at rest, but not forgotten; for she is often spoken of. Percy has learned to hear her name now without the pang it once brought him; and he often talks of her to her child. And in his room there hangs a likeness of her. Not of Lisa as he had last known her, pale and drooping; but Lisa as she had been in the first days of their wedded happiness, joyous and blooming, and radiant with beauty. It is from that likeness, painted from memory by Isabel, that May has learned to know the young mother she lost so early.

THE END.



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